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Review of Land
Management Services
delivered under contractual
arrangements between
Director of National Parks
and Austland Services Pty
Ltd

Prepared for
Director of National Parks
Australian Government

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Executive Summary

The pastoral leases over Calperum and Taylorville Stations in the Riverland of South Australia were purchased with a combination of Australian Government and private philanthropic funds. The properties were vested in the Director of National Parks and have been managed by Austland Services Pty Ltd (ALT) for a contract period which finishes on 30 June 2008.

Management to date has been focused on conservation and sustainable development objectives through implementation of a Management Plan for the properties finalised in February 2005. More recently a 'Strategic Vision' document has been drafted placing greater emphasis on achievement of regional conservation objectives through community capacity building.

This Review has been commissioned to assess possible changes to simplify contractual and consultative arrangements; to assess the extent to which 'community capacity building' has been delivered; and to identify options for future management arrangements, community input and enhancing the considerable investment by all parties in the current arrangements.

The review of relevant documents and extensive consultation with stakeholders resulted in findings that long standing perceptions and concerns among key regional stakeholders are impacting on efforts relevant to achievement of regional conservation objectives and community capacity building.

No substantive justification has been identified for excluding ALT from performing the management role at Calperum and Taylorville after June 2008.

The current Manager at Calperum and his staff are considered to be competent and capable of collaborative management in pursuit of regional conservation objectives through community capacity building.

With the exception of data management, management systems currently in place are generally robust and effective.

There is a significant commitment on the part of volunteers to achievement of the management objectives for the properties.

Areas for improvement have been identified with regard to:

- transparency in decision making;
- enhanced community involvement in management planning;
- a clearer focus on more precise conservation objectives;
- improved use of science in management, especially with respect to fire, feral animals and weeds;
- investment in improved data management;
- management of the performance of Paddock Managers;
- improved collaboration with regional land management partners; and
- improved community relations.

The findings of Review give rise to sixteen specific recommendations.

Recommendations

Management Agreement

- Recommendation 1** Future managers of Calperum and Taylorville need to have a clearer focus on specific conservation outcomes and wider community involvement.
- Recommendation 2** Consideration should be given to refining the wording of the Management Agreement to highlight specific conservation objectives and headline critical performance measures.
- Recommendation 3** Consideration should be given to specifying obligations for a major overhaul of data management associated with streamlined reporting requirements, in the new Management Agreement.

Management Plan

- Recommendation 4** The Draft Strategic Vision document should be revised to be more inclusive of the potential contributions and aspirations of Biosphere Reserve land managers and other prospective partners. A revised draft of the document is attached for consideration.
- Recommendation 5** The Management Plan should be revised to provide a clearer focus on precise conservation outcomes such as:
- the extent of Mallee old growth;
 - the extent of areas of Mallee impacted by wildfires;
 - the distribution and abundance of Black-eared Miners and Pygmy Possums;
 - the numbers of migratory waterbirds using floodplain wetlands;
 - the range of age classes of spinifex; and
 - the number and distribution of active Malleefowl mounds.
- Recommendation 6** The revised draft of the Management Plan for Calperum and Taylorville should be placed on public exhibition with public input facilitated by at least two community workshops and associated field days. The Management Plan, as finally adopted, should be made publicly available.

Data management and sharing

- Recommendation 7** A comprehensive data management strategy should be devised with the multiple objectives of:
- streamlining and focusing reporting;
 - sharing data with regional land management partners and research collaborators;
 - motivating and focusing volunteer and community interest.
- Recommendation 8** The research collaboration policies for Calperum and Taylorville should target the generation and appropriate dissemination, including via the world-wide-web, of reliable data to support NRM decision-making processes.
- Recommendation 9** Annual reports should present a succinct summary of the state of regionally significant conservation assets along the lines of the draft for discussion provided as Appendix 2 to this report.

Paddock Managers

- Recommendation 10** Paddock Managers for the next five years should be selected through a public call for expressions of interest using a suitably qualified selection panel reviewing each proposal against publicly available criteria.
- Recommendation 11** Performance agreements negotiated with each Paddock Manager, while sufficiently flexible to cater for the individual circumstances, must specify a base set of 'best practice' performance requirements regarding especially safety and public relations, as well as ensuring that management provides all necessary training and support.
- Recommendation 12** A small Reference Panel of between 3 and 5 individuals with experience relevant to the science and practice of protected area management should be formed to advise the DNP and Calperum management on specific issues as required.

Issues referred to the Panel might include: the recruitment of suitable Paddock Managers; the form and scope of periodic audits or reviews of the management of individual paddocks; mediation of disputes between paddock managers; mediation of issues of concern with regional collaborators; feedback or review in the circumstances of possible management failure; and the handling of complaints.

Community relations

Recommendation 13 A robust and locally relevant community relations strategy must be devised and implemented to build wider community support for land management work at Calperum and Taylorville.

While implementation of several of the other recommendations arising from this review will enhance community engagement, specifically targeted dialogue with neighbours and Biosphere Reserve partners will be needed to build credibility and provide the basis for mutually beneficial collaborations.

Recommendation 14 This report should be provided to all those consulted during the review and made publicly available, along with both the DNP and ALT responses to its findings and recommendations.

Resourcing

Recommendation 15 The level of financial contributions offered towards the management of Calperum and Taylorville should be considered in evaluating alternative proposals for management after June 2008 and expectations of financial contributions to the management of Calperum and Taylorville must be clearly specified in any new Management Agreement.

Recommendation 16 Through the negotiation process for a new Management Agreement, funding should be sought for an investment to meet the cost of devising and implementing the data management strategy referred to in Recommendation 7.

Abbreviations

ALT	Australian Landscape Trust Incorporated
CAR	Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative
DEW	Department of the Environment and Water Resources (Commonwealth)
DNP	Director of National Parks
IBRA	Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia
IUCN	World Conservation Union
MDB	Murray Darling Basin
NHT	Natural Heritage Trust
NRM	Natural Resource Management
UNESCO	United Nations Education Science and Cultural Organisation

1. Introduction

The Director of National Parks (DNP) entered into a contract with Austland Services Pty Ltd in May 2003 for the delivery of land management services at Calperum and Taylorville Stations on behalf of the DNP. The contract expires on 30 June 2008.

In the intervening period (February 2005) the DNP finalised the *Calperum and Taylorville Stations Management Plan*. Austland Services Pty Ltd has worked to implement this Plan since that time.

This review was commissioned to assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of current contractual and management arrangements, and to propose changes for improvement in both areas.

The review also provides an opportunity to review a *Draft Strategic Vision for the management of the Calperum and Taylorville Stations* (hereafter referred to as the Draft Strategic Vision). The document was drafted just prior to the review by the Manager of the Calperum Station and staff of the DNP. I have recommended changes to the Draft Strategic Vision to take into account the findings and recommendations of the review.

It is anticipated that, later in 2008, as part of consultations leading to the development of a second Calperum and Taylorville Stations Management Plan, interested parties will have an opportunity to comment on the Draft Strategic Vision. This will occur in consultation with the contract manager to be selected to manage Calperum and Taylorville Stations from 1 July 2008 (a separate process).

It is intended that this Review will inform selection of a contractor to manage the properties for the period 2008/09 to 2012/13.

2. Background

2.1 Austland

Austland Services Pty Ltd is a company established by the Australian Landscape Trust Inc. The Australian Landscape Trust (ALT) website, www.austlandscapetrust.org.au/, describes ALT's aim as "addressing major issues in the rural sector" by a focus upon "conservation achieved through building community capacity".

In large part, through Austland Services Pty Ltd, ALT secured the contract because of a strong alignment between ALT's organisational objectives and those of the DNP (in respect of the two properties). Specifically, when entering the contract, and to the present time, the DNP aims, *inter alia*, to manage the properties consistent with the objectives of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme, with its focus on conservation through building community capacity. Both Calperum and Taylorville Stations form part of the Riverland Biosphere Reserve.

2.2 Calperum Station

The property is the subject of three pastoral leases issued by the Pastoral Board of South Australia, Calperum, Calperum Road and Yubalia. Together they cover a total area of 238,638 hectares.

Some 95% of Calperum Station is covered by Mallee vegetation communities growing on the east-west red brown dunes of the Loxton-Parilla Sands. The remaining 5% is occupied by the Murray River floodplain which includes 4 wetlands: Merreti; Woolpolool; Clover; and Woolpolool Swamp, which are part of the 30,600 hectare 'Riverland' Ramsar site.

In 1993 the Chicago Zoological Society purchased the Calperum Station leases with funds provided by the Australian Government and the McCormick Foundation, and by deed of assignment transferred the leases to the DNP to hold on trust.

The DNP negotiated the deed of assignment and subsequently entered into a Management Agreement which remains in effect.

The terms of agreement include the use of Calperum station for public education as a model for the implementation of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Action Plan (now referred to as the UNESCO Seville Strategy for Biosphere Reserves). The intention was for interested and affected groups within the community (including recreational users, local government, pastoralists, miners, educators and health workers) to participate in and learn from a model program for the ecologically sustainable use of natural resources.

2.3 Taylorville Station

The pastoral leases covering the Taylorville Station total 92,600 hectares in area. Taylorville is entirely vegetated by Mallee vegetation communities.

The Taylorville pastoral leases were purchased in 2000 by Australian Landscape Trust Association Inc. (ALT) with its own funds and funds provided by the Australian Government. By deed of assignment the leases were transferred to the DNP to hold on trust. After negotiating the deed of assignment the parties entered into a Management Agreement covering the land which remains in effect.

The terms of the agreements relate to the use of Taylorville Station for conservation and protection of Mallee and other vegetation associations on the land, along with their dependent wildlife.

The agreements also provide for the use of the land for public education as a model for the implementation of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme directed to the maintenance of regional biodiversity.

Taylorville is intended to be managed in a manner consistent with Category 5 of Schedule 8 of the Australian IUCN reserve management principles prescribed by the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Regulations 2000*, that is, as a habitat/species management area. This category is consistent with management of IUCN Category IV reserves.

2.4 Management Agreement

The Management Agreement entered into by DNP and Austland Services Pty Ltd in May 2003 sets out the terms under which Austland agrees to perform management Services at Calperum and Taylorville in accordance with the Management Plan, annual Operations Plans and the explicit terms of the Agreement.

Explicit provisions relate to the form and content of the Management Plan and Operational Plans; provisions for undertaking Development Works, record keeping and audit; licencing provisions; use and acquisition of property, plant and equipment; as well as the alteration of fixed assets and the care and maintenance of assets.

Important specifications of payments to Austland, clarifications of liabilities for taxes, duties and Government charges are also detailed as well as provisions relating to Austland personnel, subcontractors and volunteers, training, occupational health and safety, insurance and dispute resolution procedures.

2.5 Management Plan

The Management Agreement obliges the Director National Parks to prepare a Plan to guide the management of the land covered by the Agreement. The Plan is to be in 'whatever form the parties consider appropriate' but the Agreement does specifically provide for the Plan to cover both properties and for the identification of management zones.

The management vision as set out in the Management Plan is:

*To promote the conservation and sustainable development of
Calperum and Taylorville Stations through community involvement,*

local capacity-building and innovative approaches to land management

The Plan identifies the following key management objectives for Calperum Station:

- *‘Provide for the management and conservation of natural resources, particularly the significant expanses of mallee and riverine floodplain.*
- *Control and manage processes responsible for habitat degradation and the rehabilitation of degraded areas.*
- *Foster and facilitate the development of ecologically sustainable industries.*
- *Provide for and foster limited sustainable public recreation within the constraints of and consistent with conservation of the natural values.*
- *Provide for public education by being a model for ecologically sustainable use of natural resources.*
- *Cooperate with Bookmark Biosphere Reserve partners in making Bookmark an innovative and successful model of the Biosphere philosophy.*
- *Foster and facilitate community capacity building in conservation.’*

For Taylorville Station, the Management Plan identifies a separate set of key management objectives:

- *‘Conserve and protect the land in its natural condition as part of the National Reserve System.*
- *Conserve and protect indigenous flora and fauna and habitats (particular regard will be given to implementing actions in approved Recovery Plans for threatened species).*
- *Eradicate or control exotic flora and fauna.*
- *Conserve and protect specific ecological, scenic, cultural and other nominated features.*
- *Protect from injury by fire (including the establishment of an appropriate fire management regime to maintain intact mallee associations).*
- *Provide for limited visitor use, consistent with the broad management objectives.’*

2.6 Operational Plans

The Management Agreement obliges Austland to prepare an annual Operational Plan by not later than 31 May each year covering the period of the immediately succeeding year commencing 1 July and to submit the Plan to the DNP for approval.

The Operational Plan is to be consistent with and give effect to the Management Plan outlining the nature and costs of all proposed projects and programs, detailing sources of income to meet the costs involved.

2.7 Riverland Biosphere Reserve

Originally designated as the Bookmark Biosphere Reserve, the Riverland Biosphere Reserve covers a total area of more than 900,000 hectares. It includes the Chowilla Game Reserve, Chowilla Regional Reserve, Dangalli Conservation Park, and Bird's Australia's Gluepot Reserve; all of which adjoin Calperum and/or Taylorville. The Biosphere Reserve also includes Banrock Station further downstream.

3. Review Methodology

3.1 Review Purpose and Goal

The Review seeks to improve the contractual arrangements and their implementation in the light of changed circumstances since the signing of the current Management Agreement in May 2003. The review is to focus on the effectiveness of the current contractual arrangements in delivering on the stated objectives of these arrangements, and the appropriateness of the current arrangements in terms of the extent to which the objectives of the current contract align with current Government priorities and community needs.

3.2 Terms of Reference

The major tasks for the review are set out in the brief as follows:

- Assess whether (and if so what) changes in arrangements would be possible and desirable to simplify these contractual and consultative arrangements (including the adequacy of current audit and review arrangements).
- Assess to what extent the management arrangements over the last five years have delivered the sort of 'community capacity building' that is now desired, as articulated in the Draft Strategic Vision document. What issues or impediments may prevent delivery of the Strategic Vision in the future?
- Identify immediate and long term options for future management arrangements between the Director of National Parks, the Australian Landscape Trust Pty Ltd and the Chicago Zoological Society Inc, including by reference to those responsible for the management of Calperum and Taylorville Stations (such as staffs of DNP and ALT).
- Identify options for the community to provide input to the management of Calperum and Taylorville Stations. To what extent have these options been utilised during the term of the current contract?
- Identify options for enhancing the considerable investment by all parties in the current arrangements.

3.3 Review Process

3.3.1 Document Review

Documents reviewed included:

- *Agreement between the Director National Parks and Austland Services Pty Ltd in relation to Management of Calperum and Taylorville Stations, May 2003 (Management Agreement).*

- *Draft Strategic Vision for the management of the Calperum and Taylorville Stations, DNP & ALT*, September 2007.
- *Calperum and Taylorville Stations Management Plan: Consisting of a Description of Calperum and Taylorville Stations and a Management Plan*, Parks Australia, Australian Government Department of Environment and Heritage, February 2005.
- Operational Plans for management of the sites.
- Annual reports of actions taken against specifications in the Management Agreement and Management Plan.
- Quarterly reports

The initial focus of the document review was to:

- clarify the contextual framework within which the Management Agreement, Management Plan and Draft Strategic Vision documents have been formulated;
- confirm the linkages between key elements of these documents;
- identify the obligations of the parties to the Management Agreement; and
- verify explicit or implicit expectations of other key stakeholders.

The Management Plan was examined to consider the extent to which it systematically addresses the issues and obligations identified in the Management Agreement and the refined objectives more recently set out in the Draft Strategic Vision document.

Together, these steps provided initial insights into the effectiveness and appropriateness of the contractual arrangements for the management of Calperum and Taylorville Stations. This work was seen as an essential prerequisite for worthwhile field inspections and consultations with stakeholders.

Issues on which further clarification or information was sought included:

- the native title situation;
- the level and nature of protection for Taylorville;
- the level and nature of engagement with Indigenous communities and traditional owners.

3.3.2 Preliminary contacts and consultation

The principal aim of this phase of the review was to establish contact with the on-site managers to facilitate a field inspection and by phone and email to arrange meeting times and locations with as many key stakeholders in the region as possible so that an effective itinerary could be formulated for the planned trip to the sites and the region.

3.3.3 Site inspections and consultation in the Riverland

Travel to the Riverland provided the opportunity to meet with site managers and inspect the properties under management to get a clear understanding of the on-ground challenges, and day-to-day operations.

Additionally, consultation with the site managers and staff focused on getting an understanding of their view of the management arrangements, their commitment to effective management and implementation of the Management Plan, and their capability to deliver the outcomes set out in the Plan and Draft Strategic Vision.

The rest of the week-long visit was spent meeting with other key stakeholders in the region. A list of people consulted in the review is provided in Attachment 1. People unavailable at the time of the visit to the Riverland were contacted by phone or email.

While the consultation was qualitative, discussions were consistently guided by a short list of questions framed to draw responses on:

- Levels of local involvement with planning and management of the sites;
- Varying visions for management of the sites;
- Identification of obstacles to achieving objectives;
- Options for overcoming these obstacles;
- Levels of awareness of management arrangements and planning initiatives;
- Perceptions of current problems (if any) in management arrangements;
- Suggestions for changes to management arrangements;
- Levels of interest in and preference for manner of engagement in planning and management of the sites;
- Overall assessment of the level of resourcing for management of the sites; and
- Overall assessment of the effectiveness of current management of the sites.

3.3.4 Summary and analysis of issues arising from the review

With the benefit of the field inspection and consultation with the on-ground managers and regional stakeholders, a summary and analysis of issues arising was undertaken. This was augmented with follow-up discussions to clarify issues raised and also a limited amount of wider discussion with people engaged in similar or related tasks to explore alternative arrangements for delivering the desired outcomes.

The results of this work along with subsequent findings and recommendations are detailed in later sections of this report.

3.3.5 Report Preparation

Based on initial document review and stakeholder consultations a Preliminary Draft Report was prepared as the basis for initial discussions with DNP and staff. Following these discussions and follow-up consultation with relevant stakeholders, a formal Draft Report and a revised *Draft Strategic Vision for the management of the Calperum and Taylorville Stations* were submitted to DNP for consideration.

The report was subsequently refined after consideration of feedback received and clarifications sought.

4. Issues Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Document Review

Management Agreement

The Management Agreement document entered into by DNP and Austland Services Pty Ltd on 9 May 2003 provides a comprehensive outline of a robust governance framework within which the properties are to be managed. Detailed specifications are provided to ensure appropriate accountability for financial management.

Reporting requirements are embedded in several sections of the agreement without anywhere being pulled together to more visibly outline the cumulative total of obligations.

The references to the Management Plan make no mention of either the headline objectives of the management or the process by which the Plan is to be developed.

Management Plan

The Calperum and Taylorville Stations Management Plan is in two parts. Part one consists of a succinct description of the two properties including an outline of the physical environment, biological resources and social and economic values. Part two sets out the management context and explains how the properties will be managed.

The Plan is systematically presented with each major management issue dealt with under a consistent set of headings: Aim; Background; Policy; and Prescriptions. This makes the document easy to read and reference.

In some sections the aims are very broad. For example:

- To conserve and rehabilitate key species and communities of native vegetation on Calperum and Taylorville Stations.
- To protect, maintain and enhance viable populations of native animal species with a focus on threatened species.
- To manage the floodplain system of Calperum station to maintain and enhance its biological diversity, consistent with national and international obligations.

The absence of more precise goals and performance measures limits the usefulness of the document in providing a framework for the management contracts with Paddock Managers and the templates for routine reporting that might otherwise be more readily linked to the Plan.

This coupled with the level of detail in specified policies and prescriptions in the Plan tends to drive a reporting schedule which is focused on documenting micro activity rather than delivery of conservation outcomes.

Operational Plans and State of the Parks Reports

These plans and reports are comprehensive and systematic. They are very detailed with regard to activities undertaken. This seems to be dictated by detailed prescriptions in the Management Plan. While this linkage is important the level of detail involved seems to be unduly onerous and has the potential to push management in the direction of documenting activity rather than effectiveness.

There is very limited focus on conservation outcomes from the activities. A stronger focus on documenting the resources and core programs (as opposed to individual activities) directed to achieving specific conservation objectives set out in the Management Plan would be more meaningful.

Quarterly Reports

The quarterly activity reports continually restate the policies and prescriptions in the Management Plan and systematically report actions against each individual prescription.

As a means of tracking activity and holding management accountable for the expenditure of public funds these reports seem to be quite useful.

They are less useful in focusing the activity of staff and volunteers on the achievement of conservation goals.

DNP Review and Audit reports.

Section 2 (g) requires that ALT *'afford adequate facilities for annual audit and inspection by the Director of financial records relating to any expenditure under this Agreement and other data relevant to the Management Services.'*

The information provided by ALT for the 2006-07 financial year indicates sound management of the funds provided by DNP and from the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) during the year.

Within DNP there seems to have been an assumption at the time of signing of the Management Agreement that ALT would contribute in cash and kind, an amount approximating the level of investment of Government funds. However, there is no evidence that this expectation was ever formally specified in the contractual arrangements.

For the 2006-07 financial year there is no evidence of ALT funds expended over and above those provided by government. Presumably this means that the only ALT contribution for the year has been 'in kind' contributions which do not appear to have been the subject of detailed reporting in terms which attribute financial value. For example, it is understood that volunteer hours are tallied and reported but a dollar value does not appear to have been attributed to them.

The current Calperum Manager is unaware of any contractual undertaking for matching funds and notes that ALT has at various times during its management of Calperum and Taylorville invested significant amounts of cash in particular projects. In 2007 ALT committed an additional \$60,000 per annum for 3 years to support the development of an explicit education and capacity-building strand in the Riverland.

The Manager also believes that it is not unreasonable that investment in projects will occur early in a management contract, rather than towards the end. Moreover, it is asserted that there are significant ongoing contributions of resources in numerous forms from ALT that should be borne in mind, including investments in built assets and fittings.

Strategic Vision for the Management of the Calperum and Taylorville Stations (DNP, September 2007) (referred to as the Draft Strategic Vision)

The Draft Strategic Vision document has been treated as a 'preliminary internal draft' for the purposes of this review. The document renews the focus of management of the properties to natural and cultural heritage values in a way which seeks to engage the wider community and also other land managers in the Murray Mallee landscape.

The Strategic Vision document is a useful vehicle for refocusing attention on the issues and outcomes which matter. It needs to be incorporated in a revised and updated Management Plan for the properties.

The document has been revised to address the issues raised in this review, particularly to make sure that Calperum is positioned to be responsive to opportunities for region-wide collaboration and sensitive to the objectives and aspirations of potential collaborators so that bilateral and multilateral arrangements can be entered into which are 'win-win' for all involved.

4.2 Consultation

Management, staff and volunteers

Calperum currently has a core staff made up of a resident Manager, Administration Manager, Research and Monitoring Co-ordinator and two Field Officers. This level of staffing is augmented by Trainees, Students undertaking field placements and volunteers who either undertake general duties or have settled into task specific roles which match their skills and experience.

While there have clearly been issues of high staff turnover in the past, staffing is considered to have stabilised since the appointment of the current manager just over two years ago.

The staff and core volunteers present as a committed and cohesive team. All would like to have more resources to support their activities; recognise that information management and other systems need refinement; that more needs to be done to better engage with the general community; but all are highly motivated to take on these challenges.

The layout and functioning of the office and associated facilities seem to be quite systematic and efficient. Staff and volunteers seem to be enjoying their work and taking pride in recent achievements, improvements in systems for managing volunteers, maintaining equipment and improving the landscaping around the office and workshop compound.

Some stakeholders including some neighbours and Paddock Managers are critical of existing management, arguing that the on-site manager has little decision making autonomy with key decisions being made in Melbourne. Some allege there is a lack of transparency in dealing with people. One neighbour and Biosphere Reserve partner considers the Manager is 'aloof' and 'officious' but subsequently acknowledged that there had been little contact in recent times, that past problems resulted in lingering tensions, and ultimately went so far as to say that the Current manager is 'one of the better managers and a bit is starting to happen'.

On balance, comments about current management and staff during the consultation process for this review were overwhelmingly positive, especially with regard to improvements over the past two years. The manager exhibits a strong commitment to outcome-based management and reporting and is keen to better focus the work of Paddock Managers with a program which is both tenure and issue based.

Paddock Managers

An early initiative in the management of Calperum and Taylorville was the involvement of volunteer land carers. This has been progressively formalised and in 2001 became known as the 'Paddock Adoption Scheme'.

This involves the engagement of volunteer Paddock Managers who take on responsibility for specific sections of the properties, reporting monthly to the Manager on activities undertaken to control feral animals, remove weeds, maintain fencing, revegetation plantings, fire management and other infrastructure, and generally provide a management presence, reporting back to management on observations and issues of interest or concern.

Paddock Managers also undertake routine research and monitoring tasks including annual fauna surveys.

In 2002, land carers involved in the scheme formed a group which became known as Community Land Management (CLM). This was initially seen as a significant step forward, facilitating the standardisation of arrangements between management and the individual Paddock Managers with formalised contracts being consistently introduced.

It is clear from the consultations undertaken for this review that significant tensions have developed between Paddock Managers and increasingly, people are opting not to be part of CLM, but to negotiate their paddock management contract directly with Calperum management.

Paddock Managers are clearly a varied group. Many exhibit a very strong commitment to management of the land for conservation purposes and are passionate in their determination to remove feral animals and weeds from the paddocks for which they are responsible. They systematically recruit other volunteers to assist them with their tasks, routinely report to management on their activities and seek advice and assistance when necessary.

However, some Paddock Managers and other stakeholders feel that some Paddock Managers are not pulling their weight; are not fully committed to managing the land to achieve conservation objectives and treat their paddock as a private hunting reserve, visited only when they want to do some shooting. These criticisms extend to allegations that people are effectively 'farming goats' for their own self interest rather than being committed to their extermination in the interests of protecting and enhancing natural heritage values.

Such tensions give rise to vigorous exchanges of allegations with claims that some Paddock Managers are given special treatment by management, that there is a lack of transparency in decision making and a lack of consistency in application of rules and requirements for training and accreditation with regard to gun safety, fire emergency and associated issues.

There are signs that more of a team approach is emerging with people being willing to work together, sharing expertise to help one another get the job done. The team of volunteers from Renmark Lions Club who look after the Oak Bore paddock are an interesting example. They are an organised group, rather than an individual who visits the paddock occasionally with a few mates. They readily admit that their skills and experience lie in undertaking manual 'handyman' tasks rather than in the wildlife survey and other tasks, but they are interested and keen to learn from others with knowledge and experience in these areas. They have reportedly done a fine job of restoring and maintaining the Oak Bore quarters which are available for use as an outstation to accommodate research and survey volunteers, and have recently completed rainwater capture and plumbing work to enhance fire management capacity in the area.

When asked about the possible value of instituting some form of peer review or audit of paddock management activities on perhaps an annual basis, many Paddock Managers reacted positively. It seems that there was previously a form of rolling 'review' of the management of individual paddocks but tensions between Paddock Managers had made this problematic in some circumstances. One Paddock Manager felt that the reviews or audits were a good idea but should be done by an independent person, although it was ultimately acknowledged that if people got on with one another, being involved in reviewing different paddocks might be worthwhile.

Neighbours

Comments by neighbours during the consultation for this review, not surprisingly, raised concerns about fires, fences and feral animal control programs.

The availability of water is obviously a contentious and overlapping issue. If water sources are not closed off, feral goat numbers increase in adjacent areas, kangaroo populations increase and Yellow-throated Miners (*Manorina flavigula*) can survive and interbreed with the nationally endangered Black-eared Miner (*Manorina melanotis*). If water sources are removed entirely, fire management and asset protection options are constrained, although it is generally acknowledged that fire fighting in Mallee vegetation is usually reliant on dry, earthmoving techniques and back-burning rather than relying on scarce water.

Of course, the situation is complicated when adjoining pastoral properties understandably retain water sources on their land but find that in dry times, fodder plants become scarce on their land but are relatively plentiful on adjoining land from which stock have been excluded. Not surprisingly, this situation gives rise to allegations about feral goats moving across property boundaries and the inadequacy of control measures.

In one instance, the current Manager and staff were characterised as being 'good neighbours' but are seen as being somewhat slow to act on some important issues because they have to refer matters to ALT of DNP for decision.

The approach to interpersonal contacts and what has been perceived to be a rigid philosophy on the part of some individual ALT Trustees has been a major problem for relations with neighbours in the past.

At least one neighbour and at least one other nearby property owner hold to a strong view that at least parts of Calperum could be sustainably grazed on a limited basis without threatening heritage values; that 'cell grazing' can be an alternative to 'cell burning' in fire management and even that existing water allocations should be used for a limited almond orchard venture to generate income to support on-going sustainable management. While these notions were generally promptly dismissed as inappropriate by most other people consulted, a few individuals are clearly of the view that grazing is 'blindly opposed on a philosophical basis' without 'credible middle ground' options being explored.

One pastoralist neighbour went further and asserted that Mallee needs fire and that there should not be such a preoccupation with excluding fire to protect 'old growth Mallee'.

Biosphere Reserve Partners

The Management Plan for Calperum and Taylorville Stations commits to fostering the biosphere reserve concept in the surrounding Riverland community.

The Plan notes that the Biosphere Reserve 'and Calperum in particular' has served as 'a model for biosphere reserve management in Australia since 1993 through education, hosting international visitors and demonstration of the principles underlying the Programme'.

Biosphere Reserve partners express very strong views about what they perceive to be a lack of commitment to this collaborative activity on the part of ALT and Calperum management. While much of the tension and ill feeling seems to have its origins in the debates over the location of the Mc Cormick Centre, it is obviously a continuing obstacle to effective engagement with key elements of the wider community.

Despite the fact that the DNP is represented on the Biosphere Reserve Committee, several of the key partners consulted are concerned that ALT and Calperum management have disengaged as true partners in the Reserve.

At least one of the partners was prepared to volunteer that there were some instances of useful collaborations such as on Green Corps projects and on the use of Calperum nursery and shadehouse facilities for regeneration projects but there was a gap with regard to 'strategic engagement'.

The Calperum Manager responds to these comments by saying that he has signalled a willingness to be involved in 'specific outcome oriented projects'.

ALT Trustees

The ALT Trustees worked with Australian Government staff in the shared task of writing the management contract 10 years ago and note that 'the planning and management of Calperum and Taylorville stations are set in a context largely shaped by the contract itself, the Management Plan, the review and reporting procedures and organisational budgets for each year'.

The Trustees believe that there have been significant outcomes at Calperum and Taylorville over the last ten years including significant improvements in the condition of the land and its biodiversity despite the lengthy drought; improvements in infrastructure which delivers community and environmental services; high levels of community commitment; and significant learning by all participants about wetland management, revegetation in dry conditions, support for long term volunteers, recovery of biodiversity through management of feral animals, support of community leadership in the achievement of specific goals and about community capacity building.

The central role of the Paddock Adoption Scheme is noted along with its evolution in response to the needs and interests of its participants. The importance of local involvement and local expertise in areas such as the implementation of species recovery plans is also acknowledged and the Trustees state that 'ALT maintains an "open door" policy to community members and organisations with a passion for any particular issue that is compatible with the contract and ALT's values that can be aided to the degree possible by ALT staff'.

However, the Trustees believe that:

- 'Cross-tenure initiatives may require a different approach that develops partnerships and projects around other planning frameworks. One example is the collaboration that is needed to achieve goals and secure support for initiatives that address issues in regional natural resource management.'
- 'The deliberate development of a higher public profile for Calperum, Taylorville and the associated Mc Cormick Centre for the Environment is a necessary next step in broadening public interest well beyond the core supporters group.'

The Trustees believe that 'the burden of reporting responsibilities' under the current management arrangements should be reduced.

The Trustees also advocate a more proactive program of public visibility which should include greater recognition of the achievements of community members involved in management of Calperum and Taylorville.

Significant engagement in regional planning for Natural Resource Management (NRM) is seen by the Trustees as a way of enhancing opportunities for funding projects at Calperum and Taylorville and compatible projects elsewhere. However they believe that NRM objectives and priorities as currently perceived may not match those of Calperum and Taylorville and addressing this issue may require action to actively seek engagement and partnerships with a range of groups and organisations with compatible interests.

Several of the ALT Trustees have been involved since the inception of the current management arrangements but a conscious effort has been made in recent times to bring in 'new blood' to enhance the skill set around the table to have fresh eyes review aspects of ALT's approach and operations.

Renmark Paringa Council

To gain a Council perspective on the management of Calperum and Taylorville, discussions were initiated with the current Mayor, the former Mayor, Council's Deputy Manager, Community Services and a former officer of Council.

The overall impression gained is that the primary engagement between Council and Calperum management relates to the planning and development of the Mc Cormick Centre.

Observations were made that there seems to be very little news on management issues coming out of Calperum to the wider community, that is, beyond the volunteers directly involved. There seems to be a widely held perception that Calperum has been shut up and the public are excluded from the properties unless people are part of the select group of Paddock managers and volunteers who have access.

One person consulted recalls early commitments to hold public forums on any changes to traditional land use so that people could have input and be informed of

any land management issues before they changed, but concludes that this wasn't ever taken seriously by ALT.

One optimal management regime proposed would involve 'a board of local people that would have between them demonstrated expertise in all aspects of land and wetland management under the direction of State and Federal Environment Departments'.

The previous Mayor, responsible for Council collaboration with ALT on the establishment of the Mc Cormick Centre, believes that ALT 'have done a pretty good job' he acknowledges that there was 'a bit of politics involved' with people jockeying for positions in the early days but that this is no longer an issue. However, he believes 'local engagement with the community has probably slipped a bit' and that it is time for some increased activity on this front, possibly through the establishment of a 'Friends of Calperum' type organisation. It was of interest that he seemed to have little knowledge of the Paddock Managers and their role and was similarly vague about the details of the Biosphere Reserve or prospects for revitalising it.

Overall, the previous Mayor believes that the future of Calperum and Taylorville will be best assured by a 'steady as she goes' approach; he has no problems with current management arrangements; has a high regard for the professionalism of the current Manager; and believes that the only obstacle to achieving objectives is the available resources. He believes that current levels of resourcing are adequate for the current activities but additional resources will be needed if more is to be achieved.

The current Mayor was interested to know that the review was taking place but said he has had minimal involvement with Calperum.

Council's Deputy Manager Community Services believes that more could be done to inform the community through education activities and acknowledges that 'lots of people don't understand what goes on at Calperum'.

DEH and SA Government Agencies

The Department of Environment and Heritage is a neighbour, in its capacity as the land manager responsible for Dangalli Conservation Park, and is also a Biosphere Reserve Partner.

Regional DEH staff acknowledge the importance of their integrated Fire Management Plan with Calperum but there is 'very little consultation and involvement in planning processes other than an invitation to comment on the final management plan in March 2005'. The relationship with Calperum is described as 'neutral', but staff believe that management has improved a lot in recent years.

The DEH Conservation Programs Unit (CPU) work closely with Calperum staff on projects such as the Bush Stone-curlew (*Burhinus grallarius*) and Golden Bell Frog (*Litoria reniformis*) recovery projects. The involvement of Calperum is

credited with increasing the level of local interest in these recovery projects and DEH is interested in exploring options for further collaboration.

Floodplain management is identified as a weakness with a missed opportunity for a 're-wetting cycle' in Lake Merreti given as an example. However, the Calperum Manager advises that Merreti was last wetted in Spring/Summer of 2006-2007 under a curtailed wetting/drying program negotiated with State agencies after the withdrawal of earlier verbal advice that a fuller program for Merreti and Woolpolool had been approved. It was made clear during those negotiations that water would not be made available for further wetting until the drought outlook improved. It is also understood that ALT has invested considerable resources into floodplain management issues, as exemplified by the GridWell project which was a catalyst for further investigation of groundwater salinity in the floodplain.

The absence of arrangements for cooperative partnerships is recognised by DEH as a problem. This is attributed to limited resources and competing priorities in DEH, but the possibility of more structured discussions around strategies for threatened species management is seen as an area for improvement in the working relationship.

DEH suggestions for improvement in Calperum management also include increased resourcing, including staffing; increased links with the regional NRM Board, and particularly "a great opportunity to lead a research agenda that is linked to the regional Research prospectus for the SA MDB NRM Board".

DEH advocate improved resourcing and a clear focus for the role of Calperum in delivering conservation priorities. 'Floodplain and wetland management could be more effectively delivered and linked to the regional processes'.

DEH note that the Riverland Biosphere Reserve concept is 'not a vibrant initiative', largely because of the lack of dedicated funds. DEH would like to have a stronger engagement, subject to available resources.

DEH note that their approach to dealing with Indigenous issues in the Riverland is 'low key' because of the difficulties with engagement as a result of the high levels of displacement of the traditional owners during the period of European settlement.

The South Australian Department of Technical and Further education (TAFE) make significant use of Calperum as field laboratory for courses in eco-tourism, environmental studies and conservation management. The Station has been used for work placements for students/trainees and was used as the base for a 16 week program on Australian Indigenous Culture for young Indigenous people considered to be 'at risk' either in the community or in years 10, 11 and 12 of high school. Five of the eight students received certificates on successful completion of the program.

Staff from the NRM Board have had some contact with Calperum, especially on environmental education matters. There is a desire to see more public awareness and information work undertaken. 'Calperum needs to come into town rather than

expecting people to come out to Calperum'. Establishment of the Mc Cormick Centre has been a step forward but 'more needs to be done.' Past tensions are characterised as issues between some ALT Trustees and the community rather than between Calperum management and the community. Calperum is seen as a 'fantastic education and research resource, but is little utilised and little known'. There is seen to be no reason to fundamentally change the current management arrangements but a strong view that more needs to be done.

DNP and DEWR staff

The DNP noted that, as statutory authorities go, the DNP is only a relatively small agency; yet, the DNP is aware it is seen in the region as 'the Commonwealth'. Despite its limitations, the DNP reaffirmed a commitment to maintaining an active, cooperative presence in the area, including through engagement in the Riverland Biosphere Reserve Committee and other initiatives led by government and landholders in the region.

Clearly, in managing Calperum and Taylorville Stations through a contract manager, much depends on the performance of the contract partner's on-site manager. The DNP expressed concern the existing contractual arrangement may not provide the DNP with sufficient provision to respond to underperformance on the part of any future on-site manager and to give confidence in the quality and continuity of management. It was noted however that this should not be taken to suggest the DNP is dissatisfied with the present contractor ALT or the current or any past on-site Manager.

DNP is concerned to ensure that enhanced collaboration with other property managers to achieve regional conservation goals must cascade through to provide guidance for the specific actions to be taken by volunteer Paddock Managers on Calperum and Taylorville.

Service Clubs and others

A core group of people associated with Adelaide Rotary Clubs and in the wider Rotary District 9520 are enthusiastic about the work being undertaken at Calperum and keen to assist as volunteers, especially supporting the scientific work being undertaken as part of the management of Calperum and Taylorville. They are keen to see the current management arrangements continue and look forward to expanding their involvement in volunteer activities.

As already mentioned, the paddock management work of the Renmark Lions Club provides a good example of what this can involve in practice.

5. Findings

The brief for the review sought advice on:

- possible changes to simplify contractual and consultative arrangements;
- delivery of 'community capacity building';
- options for future management arrangements;
- options for community input to management; and
- options for enhancing investments in the current management arrangements.

The findings from this review can be grouped under six headings related to issues arising from the review of documents and consultation with stakeholders:

- Management and transparency
- Management planning
- Data management and reporting
- Performance of Paddock Managers
- Community relations
- Resourcing.

Management and transparency

Some key regional stakeholders obviously have long memories with regard to what others might have considered to be only minor incidents or issues from the distant past. Some of these relate to collaborative arrangements within the Riverland Biosphere Reserve, fire management, water source management, feral animal control programs, and access for the general public.

While there can be counter arguments from Calperum management on most, if not all of these, the strength of the perceptions and their relevance as impediments to effective stakeholder relationships and, as a result, to effective management of the properties, must be acknowledged and addressed.

It is clear from this review that a renewed effort is needed to ensure that Calperum and Taylorville play a role and are seen to play a role in landscape-wide initiatives across the Mallee and Murray floodplain components of the Murray Darling Depression Bioregion. The NRM Ministerial Council publication "*Directions for the National Reserve System – A Partnership Approach*" provides a framework for progress in this regard.

It is worth noting that since the establishment of the Riverland Biosphere Reserve the array of vehicles for achieving land management collaboration across the landscape has increased significantly. Yes, it could be achieved by a reinvigoration of the existing Biosphere Reserve, but some people find this concept somewhat vague and intangible. For some, it is more of a superficial badging exercise than a practical framework for land management collaboration.

Alternative frameworks for regional collaboration include an NRM based approach focused on the Catchment Action Plan and/or the Living Murray initiative; a tourism based approach focused on the National Landscapes concept being developed at a Commonwealth level; and the cross jurisdictional network of protected area managers under the Mallee Parks partnership program.

It is less important to lock into a single conceptual framework than it is to ensure that a set of core principles are applied. These include:

- early and on-going discussions with all prospective collaborators;
- efficient data management and sharing so that trends in core conservation indicators are readily available to all the collaborators and routinely reported to the wider community;
- specific collaboration to develop and implement integrated fire management plans;
- specific collaboration to achieve shared objectives in feral animal control; and
- establishing and maintaining a clear relationship between regional conservation goals and the specific obligations of volunteer Paddock Managers on Calperum and Taylorville.

High staff turnover in the past and perceptions of indecisive local management coupled with stories of insensitive management 'by decree' from ALT in Melbourne or DNP repeatedly referring issues to their lawyers for advice before making decisions have reduced confidence in local management in some quarters.

This review has found no evidence of any lack of authority being exercised by the local Manager and no evidence of inappropriate interference from Melbourne in the routine operations of Calperum and Taylorville.

The overwhelming conclusion from this review is that the current on-site Manager and his staff are competent and suitably empowered to make decisions.

With the possible exception of data management, management systems in place at Calperum seem to be generally robust and effective but may need to be more transparently communicated to key stakeholders to avoid unfounded criticism which has the potential to derail efforts to mobilise wider community support.

Community capacity building objectives have been at best only partially met and effort needs to be put into improving community relations and being able to demonstrate meaningful benefits to the wider community from the management of Calperum and Taylorville.

The review has identified no substantive reason to exclude ALT from management of Calperum and Taylorville after the expiry of the current contract in June 2008, but it is understood that Government policy on procurement will require a public call for expressions of interest from suitably qualified bodies to ensure the best available management of the properties for the period beyond June 2008.

While options have not been thoroughly tested, informal consultation with some organizations engaged in managing land for conservation suggest that the most likely outcome from such a call might be a proposal from an alliance or consortium of such groups. The nature of the relationship that might be developed between the groups and the way in which they might deal with the community capacity assets developed thus far by ALT, such as the Paddock Managers Program, will require careful consideration.

The next contract should include explicit management performance standards and tighter provisions for annual review of management performance so that DNP can have a higher level of confidence in management and an opportunity to address performance issues and fine tune the focus of management during the term of the contract.

- Finding 1:** Long standing perceptions and concerns among key regional stakeholders are impacting on efforts to achieve better engagement with key stakeholders and the wider community, and need to be addressed.
- Finding 2:** There is no substantive justification for excluding ALT from performing the management role at Calperum and Taylorville after the expiry of the current management contract in June 2008.
- Finding 3:** The current Manager at Calperum and his staff are competent and suitably empowered to make decisions necessary for the effective management of Calperum and Taylorville and to effectively engage with key regional stakeholders.
- Finding 4:** With the exception of data management, management systems currently in place are generally robust and effective.
- Finding 5:** Greater transparency in decision making and the operation of management systems would enhance efforts to mobilise wider community support.

Management Planning

Management planning for Calperum and Taylorville has been thorough and systematic in its coverage of conservation values and actions needed to protect them.

However there appears to have been limited, if any, involvement of key stakeholders and the wider community in the planning process. This has constrained engagement and represents a missed opportunity to gain the benefit of regionally relevant ideas as well as making fertile ground for unfounded criticism.

The scope and form of the Management Plan is generally appropriate but its usefulness would be enhanced by a clearer focus on more precise conservation objectives. Such a clearer focus would ensure that the document provides a consistent framework through which management objectives and performance measures can cascade meaningfully into the management contracts of Paddock Managers, performance agreements of staff and the design and monitoring of volunteer programs and specific projects.

Particular attention needs to be given to continuing efforts towards the engagement of Indigenous Australians, despite difficulties resulting from historically high levels of displacement and disruption of local communities.

- Finding 6:** Management Planning is generally thorough and systematic in its scope and content.
- Finding 7:** Management planning would be improved by greater community involvement.
- Finding 8:** The Draft Strategic Vision document as refined during the present review has the potential to make a contribution to fulfilling the aspirations of Biosphere Reserve land managers and other prospective partners.

Finding 9: The Management Plan would be improved by a clearer focus on more precise conservation objectives and performance measures.

Finding 10: Engagement of Indigenous Australians in management planning should be encouraged and facilitated.

Data Management and reporting requirements

A large amount of information has been gathered as a result of baseline studies and follow-up work by visiting researchers and volunteers over the last decade. Current capacity to analyse, present and share this information seems to be constrained by technology and resource limitations, and by a lack of development in regional data linkages.

The more effective management of this information is not only important to provide feedback to management but also to focus and motivate staff and volunteers and to assist collaborative engagement with neighbours, Biosphere Reserve partners and the general Riverland community.

Assisted by improved data management, relevant staff and research collaborators might be encouraged to publish research and monitoring results in peer-reviewed journals. This would help enshrine scientific rigour and enhance the credibility of Calperum and Taylorville as research sites.

Improved data management would also assist in reducing the burden of routine reporting. Appropriately designed information technology systems can deliver up-to-date-reports on key activities and performance measures at any time.

While quarterly reports might be expected to remain largely as activity reports they could possibly be streamlined by consolidating many of the individual prescriptions in the Management Plan into core programs. This would open the way for quarterly reports to be divided into block reporting of staff and volunteer time devoted to each core program, with detailed reporting only on special project activity and/or budget variations on core programs.

Annual reports on the other hand might reasonably be expected to provide updates on performance with respect to the headline conservation objectives or high order performance measures identified in the Management Plan. These might include the areal extent of healthy Mallee communities, the number of active Malleefowl mounds, or the distribution and abundance of Black-eared Miners or Pygmy Possums. A possible template for such reporting is provided in Appendix 2 as a basis for discussion.

Finding 11: Investment in improved data management would deliver dividends in the form of more focused management, more motivated staff and volunteers and enhanced collaboration with key stakeholders. . Practical collaboration should be encouraged to enable micro-data to 'fit together' and enhance understandings at the regional level.

Finding 12: Improved data management could deliver the collateral benefit of more meaningful reports being delivered with reduced demands on management and staff time.

Finding 13: Publication of research and monitoring results in peer-reviewed journals would ensure scientific rigour and enhance the reputation of Calperum and Taylorville as research sites.

Performance of Paddock Managers

Many stakeholders have raised significant issues with the variable performance of Paddock Managers across Calperum and Taylorville. Addressing this issue is of critical importance for the effectiveness and the credibility of management.

Apart from maximizing the prospects for achievement of conservation objectives, ensuring consistent 'best practice' performance will significantly enhance the standing of Calperum management in the community and improve the prospects of other volunteers becoming involved who might otherwise have been inclined to keep their distance.

There clearly are performance issues in some instances including a lack of presence for extended periods, questionable commitment to feral animal removal, fire management and safety performance, reliability of reporting and willingness to work as part of a team.

These issues will be best addressed through a comprehensive approach looking at the way Paddock Managers are selected, the criteria that are the basis for selection, the detailed obligations specified in the contract, training provided, staff support and advice, the reporting requirements with respect to contract obligations, as well as periodic review or audit requirements.

The performance of Paddock managers must be linked to the achievement of regionally agreed conservation goals. This will be assisted by engaging Paddock Managers in the review of the Draft Management Plan and also through some form of specialist external involvement in oversight of the Paddock Manager Program.

Finding 14: Inconsistencies in the performance of Paddock Managers need to be addressed in the interests of management effectiveness and credibility.

Community relations

Calperum has a very loyal band of enthusiastic supporters across the community who are passionately committed to assisting management of Calperum and Taylorville in a variety of ways based on their individual skills and experience. They appear to be generally well co-ordinated and supported by staff. With respect to this core group, 'community capacity' has certainly been built.

However, feedback from the community obtained during the course of this review has included disturbing amounts of ignorance, disinterest, misinformation, distrust, disempowerment and in one or two cases evidence of 'bad-mouthing' criticism to anyone who might listen about Calperum being 'anti community'.

Some of this negative feedback stems from past incidents or issues, some from unfounded assumptions that fences and locked gates automatically signal

absolute prohibitions on public access and some can be attributed to personality clashes or wider tensions within the community.

Some also arises from a perception that Calperum takes an elitist stance, that it is selective about who it allows to be involved but is not transparent with regard to how such selections are made and that it portrays itself as a keeper of some 'holy grail' with respect to land management and volunteer management which it may share with the rest of the world, but only in a manner and at a time of its own choosing.

For some, it is suspected that references to 'community capacity building' imply a self-righteous approach which does not respect the views, life experiences, skills and livelihood imperatives of others.

Addressing negative feelings of this depth will require a willingness to go back to basics, being seen to be open to people's concerns, responding to them constructively, seeking common ground, humbly and calmly explaining irreconcilable points of difference, being willing to listen, to learn and being seen to appreciate the knowledge and skills of others.

The back to basics approach might dictate that less time is spent articulating a grand scheme for community engagement and more time is spent just getting on with low-key practical dialogue and collaboration at the local level.

Some people consulted believe that the current Manager is working in an appropriate low-key way to build relationships, is good at it and is slowly repairing the damage done previously.

A comprehensive community relations strategy could be developed, founded on a simple set of clear principles. For example a strategy could usefully be structured around basic core tasks such as:

- public exhibition of the Draft Management Plan coupled with a workshop or two and field trip involving Biosphere Reserve partners and other key regional stakeholders;
- a clear commitment to collaboration and data sharing on vegetation and fauna surveys;
- periodic news releases with collaborators on interesting findings and trends;
- a public call for Expressions of Interest for Paddock Manager roles coupled with a transparent, criteria based selection process;
- a few locally publicized tag-along tours of Calperum and Taylorville as discussed at the recent Paddock Managers meeting I attended; and
- a few clear explanations in local media about public access options and a transparent audit/review process on the performance of Paddock Managers.

Finding 15: The core group of volunteers working on Calperum and Taylorville have enhanced capacity for land management tasks, are highly committed, are well organized and are well supported by staff.

Finding 16: There is significant negative feeling in the community to aspects of the management arrangements which is a significant impediment to on-going management effectiveness.

Finding 17: Meaningfully improving community relations will require a low-key approach concentrating on practical dialogue and collaboration at the local level.

Resourcing

It is always possible to do more land management work if there are more resources available to be deployed. However, the general impression gained from this review is that the management of Calperum and Taylorville is well resourced in terms of the funds allocated by the Australian Government.

The in-kind resources provided by volunteers are a highly significant asset which could be better managed as discussed elsewhere in this report. Generally the volunteers seem to be largely motivated by the satisfaction they draw from playing a constructive role in a regionally important conservation task. Subject to the improved management suggested elsewhere in this report, the level of resourcing currently provided by volunteers seems to be quite sustainable and should be able to be grown steadily over the term of the next Management Agreement.

DNP expectations of ALT or any future management contractor to make financial contributions to the costs of managing Calperum and Taylorville need to be clarified.

The most obvious priority for increased investment in the management of Calperum and Taylorville is in the area of data management. This will require both an up-front capital investment in technology, equipment and services and also a continuing commitment of a specialist staff member to ensure that all potential benefits from the investment are delivered.

Dividends from a specific investment of this nature will be considerable and wide ranging as explained elsewhere.

Finding 18: The level of funding provided by the Australian Government is generally sufficient to provide for effective management of Calperum and Taylorville.

Finding 19: The level of resourcing provided by volunteers is significant and sustainable with improved management.

Finding 20: Expectations of financial commitments from the management contractor to the management of Calperum and Taylorville need to be clarified.

Finding 21: An investment in technology assets and specialist staffing to support improved data management would deliver significant dividends in improved management of Calperum and Taylorville as well as enhanced regional collaboration.

6. Recommendations

The preceding discussion and findings give rise to the following recommendations:

Management Agreement

- Recommendation 1** Future managers of Calperum and Taylorville need to have a clearer focus on specific conservation outcomes and wider community involvement.
- Recommendation 2** Consideration should be given to refining the wording of the Management Agreement to highlight specific conservation objectives and headline critical performance measures.
- Recommendation 3** Consideration should be given to specifying obligations for a major overhaul of data management associated with streamlined reporting requirements, in the new Management Agreement.

Management Plan

- Recommendation 4** The Draft Strategic Vision document should be revised to be more inclusive of the potential contributions and aspirations of Biosphere Reserve land managers and other prospective partners. A revised draft of the document is attached for consideration.
- Recommendation 5** The Management Plan should be revised to provide a clearer focus on precise conservation outcomes such as:
- the extent of Mallee old growth;
 - the extent of areas of Mallee impacted by wildfires;
 - the distribution and abundance of Black-eared Miners and Pygmy Possums;
 - the range of age classes of spinifex;
 - the numbers of migratory waterbirds using floodplain wetlands; and
 - the number and distribution of active Malleefowl mounds.
- Recommendation 6** The revised draft of the Management Plan for Calperum and Taylorville should be placed on public exhibition with public input facilitated by at least two community workshops and associated field days. The Management Plan, as finally adopted, should be made publicly available.

Data management and sharing

- Recommendation 7** A comprehensive data management strategy should be devised with the multiple objectives of:
- streamlining and focusing reporting;
 - sharing data with regional land management partners and research collaborators;
 - motivating and focusing volunteer and community interest.
- Recommendation 8** The research collaboration policies for Calperum and Taylorville should target the generation and appropriate dissemination, including via the world-wide-web, of reliable data to support NRM decision-making processes.
- Recommendation 9** Annual reports should present a succinct summary of the state of regionally significant conservation assets along the lines of the draft for discussion provided as Appendix 2 to this report.

Paddock Managers

- Recommendation 10** Paddock Managers for the next five years should be selected through a public call for expressions of interest using a suitably qualified selection panel reviewing each proposal against publicly available criteria.
- Recommendation 11** Performance agreements negotiated with each Paddock Manager, while sufficiently flexible to cater for the individual circumstances, must specify a base set of 'best practice' performance requirements regarding especially safety and public relations, as well as ensuring that management provides all necessary training and support.
- Recommendation 12** A small Reference Panel of between 3 and 5 individuals with experience relevant to the science and practice of protected area management should be formed to advise the DNP and Calperum management on specific issues as required.

Issues referred to the Panel might include: the recruitment of suitable Paddock Managers; the form and scope of periodic audits or reviews of the management of individual paddocks; mediation of disputes between paddock managers; mediation of issues of concern with regional collaborators; feedback or review in the circumstances of possible management failure; and the handling of complaints.

Community relations

Recommendation 13 A robust and locally relevant community relations strategy must be devised and implemented to build wider community support for land management work at Calperum and Taylorville.

While implementation of several of the other recommendations arising from this review will enhance community engagement, specifically targeted dialogue with neighbours and Biosphere Reserve partners will be needed to build credibility and provide the basis for mutually beneficial collaborations.

Recommendation 14 This report should be provided to all those consulted during the review and made publicly available, along with both the DNP and ALT responses to its findings and recommendations.

Resourcing

Recommendation 15 The level of financial contributions offered towards the management of Calperum and Taylorville should be considered in evaluating alternative proposals for management after June 2008 and expectations of financial contributions to the management of Calperum and Taylorville must be clearly specified in any new Management Agreement.

Recommendation 16 Through the negotiation process for a new Management Agreement, funding should be sought for an investment to meet the cost of devising and implementing the data management strategy referred to in Recommendation 7.

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8. Attachments

Appendix 1: Stakeholders consulted

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Appendix 2: Status of Conservation Assets – Annual Summary

(Draft template – for discussion in finalisation of revised Management Plan, specification of reporting requirement in new Management Agreement, formulation of Data Management Strategy and data sharing arrangements with regional collaborators.)

Primary Indicators

Area of 'old growth' Mallee (ha)

% of total area of Mallee assessed as 'old growth'

Area of Mallee 'old growth' burnt by wildfires

% of total area of Mallee 'old growth' burnt by wildfires

Estimated population of Black-eared Miners

Areal extent of confirmed Black-eared Miner sightings

Estimated population of Pygmy Possums

Areal extent of Pygmy Possum records

No of active Malleefowl mounds

Areal extent of active Malleefowl mounds

Number of migratory waterbirds using floodplain wetlands

Area declared 'weed free'

% of total area declared 'weed free'

Secondary Indicators

Area of fuel reduction burns

Length of fire management trails maintained

Number of fox baits laid

% of fox baits taken

Location of fox baits taken

Estimated goat population

Volunteer days worked on core programs