

What does regional natural resource management in Australia's savannas deliver?

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Regional natural resource management (NRM) is now widely advocated across Australia as part of growing policy commitment towards integrated approach to environmental management. The ability to demonstrate the effectiveness of selected regional NRM programs are critical questions now being asked by government program and regional community investors. Yet as the findings of this research highlight, collaborative efforts to evaluate outcomes generated from NRM delivery in Northern Australia is a challenge. The emphasis collaborators place on natural, social, cultural and economic *substantive outcomes* delivered in savanna regions might not necessarily be shared. Priorities and resources dedicated to deliver *enabling outcomes* – such as improving capacity building or developing socially robust approaches to developing new knowledge systems – might also not be agreed. The protracted effort required to negotiate plans and set regional targets suggest that there are significant costs to establish and maintain partnerships between scattered and diverse local communities who often have different interests in shared natural resources. Government funding offers critical drivers behind action-outcome relationships that have been facilitated through regional planning arrangements yet government agencies struggle to commit to regulatory and institutional actions needed to ensure delivery of outcomes in such remote settings. A comparison of outcomes reported within Northern Australian regions compared with the outcomes sought and captured by the NHT2 / NAP program can be used to inform improvements in current efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of regional NRM in Australia's savannas:

- Expect resource condition target setting to rely on testing links between actions and outcomes adaptively. This will need to recognise that the achievement of specific actions will need to be accepted as surrogate measure for achieving outcomes in many instances.
- Successful integration of natural resource use, planning and management through the coordination of government, community and industry perspectives and effort are just as critical to achieve outcomes as on-ground actions.
- Existing monitoring and evaluation frameworks make it difficult for government and other investors to access the full (environmental, social, cultural, and institutional) impact of regional NRM. Support for a refined assessment of outcomes delivered from integration fit for the purpose of savanna environmental management needs is required.