

HUMAN DIMENSIONS OF NRM IN SA

Development of a Human Dimensions Cluster of the NRM Research Alliance

Scoping Study and Preparatory Work Report
August 2009

interPART & Associates

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Acknowledgements

Many people contributed in the conduct of this study, providing valuable information and cooperation in the process to establish the Human Dimensions in NRM Research Cluster. These contributions are sincerely appreciated.

We also acknowledge the guidance and assistance provided by Kathryn Bellette and Janet Pedler, Director and Business Manager respectively with the SA NRM Research Alliance. This was much appreciated. Thank you also to Michelle Bald.

We hope the findings, recommendations and outcomes arising from this study will contribute to positive Cluster development and practical research outcomes that serve the interests of building a resilient future for all in SA.

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Executive Summary

South Australia, within a national and global context, is facing unprecedented challenges associated with climate variability, water availability, primary production and ecosystem integrity, socio-cultural and economic resilience, and so on.

Our current responses are not generating the change required or at a necessary temporal and landscape scale; we urgently need a different way of understanding and engaging with the world around us and managing our natural resources.

In responding to these challenges, 'people dimensions' are at the heart of the issue and are critical and core to the success of any NRM endeavour.

The human dimensions of NRM have been highlighted as a priority by both Federal and State Governments through various plans and funding programs, and are uniformly confirmed by Regional NRM Boards as an area for priority research.

In recognising this, the Research Alliance commissioned a scoping study and preparatory work to assist the establishment of a 'Human Dimensions Research Cluster'. This work has been undertaken by a team from *interPART* and Associates.

Key objectives of the consultancy were to:

- Undertake an audit of human dimensions research relevant to NRM in SA
- Refine the human dimension research and practice themes
- Facilitate development of the Human Dimensions Research Cluster
- Outline a draft business case and associated research prospectus
- Document outcomes and provide recommendations to support development of the Cluster

The assignment was conducted in three parts: Firstly, an audit of human dimensions research being undertaken as it relates to NRM in SA; secondly, a series of two facilitated workshops, conducted with internal and external stakeholders; thirdly, development of draft documents to support the formation and conduct of the human dimensions research cluster.

Two main sets of findings emerged:

- (a) Five thematic research priorities:
 - Social and economic aspects of NRM from a community perspective
 - Engagement in NRM (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) in a changing world
 - Building community resilience and adaptive capacity in the light of climate change
 - Tools and processes to support knowledge transfer, decision making, utilisation
 - Assessment, monitoring and evaluation of the human dimensions of NRM
- (b) Concern with *how* research is undertaken, which is also a research topic in its own right. These include:
 - *Knowledge utilisation and application:* the need for research to be relevant and applied; scoped, developed and implemented in collaboration with end-users (be they land managers, project officers, planners and policy makers)

- *Types of knowledge*: the need to utilise and value different types of knowledge
- *The importance of context*: socio-cultural, economic, historical, political, geographical, ecological and other factors as recognised determinants in patterns and processes of change, adaptive capacity
- *Acknowledging complexity*: in people and ecological systems and their interaction
- *The importance of communication*: including 'NRM literacy', language and translation for different audiences; co-development of understanding
- *Disconnects between policy and practice*: between, for example, the policy and culture of research and what land managers actually want
- *Cross-sector integration and collaboration*: there is a need for greater/wider cross-sector interaction - extending to sectors including rural and community development, education, health, local government, etc
- *Coordination*: reducing apparent overlaps in current research coordination initiatives; reducing needless competition, replication and enhancing collaboration and best use of scant funds
- *Capacity*: the challenges inherent in the 'human dimensions' of NRM require new skills, new ways of operating, a new kind of professional

In response to these findings, stakeholders in collaboration with the consultants have developed the framework for the establishment of the Human Dimensions Research Cluster. This includes an agreed purpose being:

To facilitate the integration of the human dimensions of NRM through multidisciplinary research approaches to achieve effective NRM outcomes.

Following from this, proposed objectives, principles, strategies, activities and governance arrangements have all been mapped out. These are detailed in various reports and draft documents.

In conclusion, the scoping and preparatory process has confirmed:

- a strong need and urgency for 'people dimensions' research in NRM, and has highlighted specific priority directions and opportunities
- that there is a clear, unique, cross-cutting role for a Human Dimensions Research Cluster
- that in facilitating research in this domain, it must be utilisation-focused and grounded in supporting and enabling community resilience
- that operation of this Cluster will require a different, more flexible and innovative approach

In progressing the establishment of the Human Dimensions Research Cluster, it is **recommended**:

- That the Cluster be actively supported and strongly championed by the Alliance and other key partners in advocating for support from and leverage with policy, planning and program stakeholders; this will require an informed, coordinated approach.
- That contributory funds are sought from stakeholders but that this should not preclude engagement or prevent initiatives from progressing; some of the most innovative outcomes emerge from resource-poor situations.

- That the identified and agreed priority need for research that is applied and that is guided by, supports and enables community resilience be strongly supported and stimulated; this should be reflected in the promotion and utilisation of participatory action research and related approaches.
- That the proposed two-pronged strategy of undertaking practical pilot research initiatives in tandem with strategic statewide policy and planning work be supported, and be underpinned with a well-considered framework and plan of action to ensure maximum advantage accrues from this.

1. Introduction

South Australia, within a national and global context, is facing unprecedented challenges associated with climate variability, water availability, primary production and ecosystem integrity, socio-cultural and economic resilience, and so on. In responding to these challenges, 'people dimensions' are at the heart of the issue and are critical and core to the success of any NRM endeavour. We need to learn how to do the 'human' aspects better. And in doing so, we need to build on existing work and experience while appreciating that new and potentially very different understandings and applications need to be shaped, actioned, integrated and evaluated.

In recognising this situation, the *SA NRM Research Alliance* commissioned an audit study and preparatory work to assist the development of a Human Dimensions of NRM Research Cluster.

Context

The NRM Research Alliance is one of seven organisations established under the 2008 Constellation SA:

'Constellation SA sets a framework for building research capabilities, and leads to innovation that is directed towards achieving the six objectives of South Australia's Strategic Plan. In short, Constellation SA is about research for innovation.'

The framework aims to strengthen collaboration between researchers and facilitate the translation of research into practical solutions. It grew out of the *SA Government's 10-year Plan for Science, Technology and Innovation*, launched in 2004.

Furthermore, *Goal 3 of the State NRM Plan* is: Communities, governments and industries with the capability, commitment and connections to manage natural resources in an integrated way. In response to Goal 3, the *NRM Council draft Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy* highlighted the following research priorities:

- Analyse, define and articulate the social and economic context of NRM, including the factors that limit and enable change
- Develop new engagement approaches and techniques that improve the level of delivery of NRM through communities and other partnerships
- Create systems that actively facilitate the transfer and sharing of knowledge (including local) and capabilities to improve NRM decisions
- Refine triple-bottom line decision-making processes and tools that can be applied to policy, investment and planning at state, regional and local level
- Develop techniques that build community capacity and lead to adaptability and stewardship, ultimately to effect landscape scale change

The *Regional NRM Boards* concur with the above needs, and have universally highlighted the need for research into the human dimensions of NRM through a

research needs audit undertaken by the NRM Board predecessor, the Centre for Natural Resources Management.

The human dimensions of NRM have been highlighted as *a priority by both Federal and State Governments* responsible for their Caring for Our Country and State Government NRM funding programs respectively.

There is work being undertaken across Australia on the social, economic and related dimensions of NRM, much of it under Federal government auspices of Land and Water Australia, DAFF, the Bureau of Rural Sciences, and the ABS, in some instances in collaboration with Regional bodies. But the work is patchy and primarily focussed around specific individual techniques and issues. Similarly, at a state level, there is a significant opportunity to bring social science and related researcher and practitioner expertise together, including in conjunction with expertise outside of SA.

The purpose of the NRM Research Alliance, as presented in the Alliance's Strategic Plan 2008 - 2011, is to:

- Foster and strengthen linkages between the users and providers of NRM science, technology and innovation;
- Foster and strengthen collaboration between providers of NRM science, technology and innovation to increase capacity and capability;
- Provide strategic advice on the adoption of NRM science, technology and innovation; and
- Attract and direct investment into NRM science, technology and innovation that will support improved NRM outcomes.

The Alliance Board comprises representatives from the Regional NRM Boards, the State NRM Council, state NRM agencies, CSIRO, the three universities, with Dr Keith Steele as the Board's independent chair.

Through the involvement of Alliance members and other stakeholders, the Alliance:

- links researchers and practitioners to target research to the high priority needs of practitioners in NRM policy, planning and practice;
- facilitates provision of vital evidence based knowledge that will provide real options for decision making
- attracts investment into NRM research in SA;
- advocates for application of research outcomes to policy, planning and practice.

The Alliance has a focus on research that considers the natural resource components in *an integrated way, at a landscape scale*. Activities are currently focused around two broad themes:

- (a) *Facilitating access to existing knowledge and expertise*, including for example coordination of databases, and research needs and capability mapping
- (b) *Developing new knowledge* to address the needs of regional NRM Boards and state NRM agencies, through a range of activities one of which is the facilitation of three new research clusters: Human Dimensions of NRM, Habitat Restoration and Sustainable Production, and Urban Water

This report summarises the conduct, findings and outcomes arising from a scoping study and preparatory work to support the establishment of a Human Dimensions of

NRM Research Cluster. Recommendations are provided for Alliance consideration. Products are appended as Annexes.

2. Objectives of the Scoping Study and Preparatory Work

Key objectives of the consultancy were to:

- Undertake an audit of human dimensions research relevant to NRM in SA
- Refine the human dimension research and practice themes
- Facilitate development of the Human Dimensions Research Cluster
- Outline a draft business case and associated research prospectus
- Document outcomes and provide recommendations to support development of the Cluster

3. Six Initial Themes

To facilitate discussion and scoping of the consultancy, the Alliance identified six broad themes of research and practice that related to the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy:

1. Defining social and economic aspects of NRM from a community perspective, set within regional demographics
2. Indigenous and non-Indigenous engagement in NRM
3. Assessing and building community resilience and adaptive capacity in the light of climate change, with a particular focus on marginal agricultural areas of the state
4. Social tools and processes to support knowledge transfer and decision making at regional and local levels
5. Monitoring and evaluation of funded activities undertaken by the human dimensions cluster
6. Corporate social responsibility and environmental sponsorship

4. Methodology

The assignment was conducted in three parts:

- (a) Firstly, an audit of human dimensions research being undertaken as it relates to NRM in SA;
- (b) Secondly, a series of two facilitated workshops, conducted with internal and external stakeholders;
- (c) Thirdly, development of draft documents to support the formation and conduct of the human dimensions research cluster.

The study was constrained by time limitations, resulting in adoption of a rapid appraisal approach to the audit component in particular.

The audit comprised a:

- National-level desktop review of human dimensions research related to proposed themes as relevant to SA;
- A preliminary state-level bibliographic review of human dimensions research being undertaken in SA by Alliance partners and others;
- 16 Key Informant Interviews;
- Dissemination of a questionnaire;
- Review of information from other sources, including findings from evaluations, scoping studies, and other consultancy work (primarily undertaken by *interPART* and Associates, and others).

Annex I contains material related to the Audit:

- *A national overview* of key research activities in the arena of 'human dimensions' according to the six broad themes under the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy, presented as a table.
- *A bibliography of state-level research and databases*; partially developed.
- Audit of Human Dimensions of NRM Research *datasheet that guided key informant interviews and the questionnaire*
- *Summary table of interview and questionnaire results* and associated but separate *respondent legend*

Findings were presented and discussed at the first '*Human Dimensions*' Workshop on the 24th July 2009, as a springboard for considering the purpose of Cluster, the kinds of activities it could undertake and practically how it might operate. Outcomes from this workshop further informed drafting of the Business Case and Research Prospectus, and development of Cluster arrangements. A core/steering group was formalised during the *second Workshop*, conducted on the 4th August 2009.

Annex II contains reports from both workshops.

5. Key Findings and Implications

Priority Research Needs and Considerations

Two main sets of findings emerged from the audit and were discussed at the workshops:

- a) Needs related to research themes and topics
- b) Needs related to how research is undertaken, which are also topics for research in their own right.

(a) Five human dimension research and application priorities were identified, within which an array of specific topics and research questions emerged. These broadly align with five of the six themes initially identified, as outlined here:

- Social and economic aspects of NRM from a community perspective
- Engagement in NRM (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) in a changing world

- Building community resilience and adaptive capacity in the light of climate change
- Tools and processes to support knowledge transfer, decision making, utilisation
- Assessment, monitoring and evaluation of the human dimensions of NRM

Corporate social responsibility and environmental sponsorship did not feature in the audit findings. This does not mean it is not an important topic for research and action, but rather may be reflective of the current global financial crisis context.

(b) The audit also identified a range of issues that warrant priority consideration in *how* research is undertaken as well as being of interest as *research topics in their own right*. These were considered at the first Human Dimensions workshop and generally confirmed during discussion at the second workshop. They include:

- *Knowledge utilisation and application*: the need for research to be relevant and applied... carefully scoped, developed and implemented in collaboration with end-users (be they land managers, project officers, planners and policy makers) to ensure applicability... and so effect desired landscape outcomes
- *Types of knowledge*: the need to utilise and value different types of knowledge (eg. community and scientific; Indigenous and non-Indigenous; multi-disciplinary; social science, social research...)
- *The importance of context*: context in terms of socio-cultural, economic, historical, political, geographical, ecological and other factors are recognised determinants in patterns and processes of change, adaptive capacity...and in how research outcomes are/are not used; 'context' needs to be better understood and designed for as an integral part of any research
- *Acknowledging complexity*: the range and interplay of 'people' factors that impact on NRM are numerous, complex and highly dynamic ... operate at different levels (individuals, families, groups, teams, organisations, networks, etc)...; facilitating effective, efficient, relevant NRM outcomes in a context of dynamic change requires further attention... 'wicked problems' approaches
- *The importance of communication*: not just within and across NRM stakeholders – how to do this better - but also 'NRM literacy' within the general population; language, terminology... role of interpretation; different forms/modes of communication for different (research and user) audiences; communication, learning and co-development of understanding
- *Disconnects between policy and practice*: between, for example, the policy and culture of research and what land managers actually want; not just a communication or extension issue; the assumption that good/relevant research will automatically/somehow lead to changed practices doesn't hold; the human dimensions of practice change must be integrated at the outset
- *Cross-sector integration and collaboration*: there is a need for greater/wider cross-sector interaction in NRM research and practice – extending to sectors including rural and community development, education, health, local

government, etc; opportunities exist for this but require nurturing, piloting and evaluating

- *Coordination*: reducing apparent overlaps in current research coordination initiatives; reducing needless competition, replication and enhancing collaboration and best use of scant funds
- *Capacity*: the challenges inherent in the 'human dimensions' of NRM require new skills... a new kind of professional... that can operate on the boundaries... at the interface.. who understands the research community and the users and can translate between them... new roles, positions... new ways of accounting for, recognising and rewarding this kind of practice... and so on.

Observations and concerns were raised during the audit regarding apparent overlaps in current research coordination initiatives (e.g. Adelaide University's The Environment Institute, the Constellation SA review).

Implications for the Cluster

- *Need*: the need to address the 'human dimensions' in NRM is confirmed as a research priority, and specific directions and opportunities have been identified
- *A Key and Unique Role*: there is a clear, unique and priority role for a Human Dimensions Research Cluster, and an opportunity to be innovative
- *Integration*: a requirement for integrated, cross-disciplinary and cross-sector work... with stakeholder engagement across the whole 'research-development-application' spectrum
- *Application*: an intentional focus on 'research for application' ... in research design, conduct and utilisation... end-users actively involved in shaping research questions and processes; the intent is to facilitate effective NRM outcomes... facilitating effective research (eg. participatory action research) is not sufficient in itself
- *Approach*: will require a different, more flexible and innovative approach as a research initiative... formation of a network with a core driver group rather than a cluster in the more conventional sense.... a network of people interested to collaborate, in different ways, in developing significant research projects to answer some fundamental NRM questions in regional and urban SA
- *Key 'functions'*: catalysing, integrating, interfacing, harnessing synergies, identifying and mobilising opportunities, coordinating, communicating, motivating and inspiring, synthesizing, providing direction and guidance re research priorities and processes, advocating, linking, networking... showcasing, illustrating and demonstrating initiatives, learning and outcomes...
- *Identity and Influence*: will require a multi-pronged strategy to build the identity, profile and credibility of the cluster and it's initiatives... in order to advance the 'human dimensions' in NRM agenda... and secure research and practice resources adequate to achieve effective results; will require a

considered performance and communication strategy (eg MERI – monitoring, evaluation, reporting/communication and improvement)...

6. Key Workshop Outcomes

Two workshops were conducted, the first being a full-day event on 24th July 2009, which was followed by a second half-day gathering on 4th August. Representatives participated from all three universities, agencies, NGOs, Regional NRM Boards and other organisations. Full details, including agendas and participant lists are provided in Annex I.

Within the context (as outlined in the Introduction) and in consideration of the audit findings, participants' experience, and deliberations from the first workshop, the following key outcomes were generated.

The Name

There is wide agreement that an engaging name is needed for the cluster... we need a better way of capturing the essence of the '*human dimensions*'. Various ideas have been proposed but nothing yet "hits the mark".

In acknowledgement that this cross-cutting initiative will operate differently to many other research clusters, consideration was also given to the terms 'cluster' and 'network'; current thinking is to retain 'cluster'.

The Purpose of the Human Dimensions Research Cluster was agreed as being:

To facilitate the integration of the human dimensions of NRM through multidisciplinary research approaches to achieve effective NRM outcomes.

Cluster Objectives were tentatively identified as being:

- to build understanding of the 'real world' dynamics that constrain and enable community resilience
- to stimulate applied research that supports and enables the realisation of relevant change
- to generate evidence-based 'human dimension' information to inform policy, planning and practice
- to develop partnerships that harness innovative, relevant human dimensions research that supports resilience and improved NRM outcomes
- to ensure research initiatives are designed and undertaken to address priority needs and application requirements
- to advocate for and accelerate adoption of change that will support community resilience

These are to be refined by the Cluster Core Group.

Guiding Principles

Workshop discussions highlighted a strong concern with *how* Cluster facilitated initiatives and research should occur in supporting and enabling community resilience; it was agreed that a set of guiding principles preface strategies.

To supplement the proposed operating principles (see below), a set of guiding principles will be developed. These intend to:

- capture the importance of relationships, trust, respect and reciprocity, etc
- acknowledge some intrinsic principles associated with social-ecological resilience as it relates to the 'human dimensions of NRM'

Proposed *operating principles* for the Cluster include:

- graduated, developmental approach ... in keeping with available capacity etc
- utilisation of 'participatory action research' (PAR) approaches... and other forms of applied research
- learning from previous work
- ongoing reporting of research initiatives, progress, learning
- utilising ongoing opportunities for collaboration and sharing knowledge during life of projects

Strategies and the Business Case and Research Prospectus

Based on the overwhelming priority consideration that the Cluster facilitate applied research that is contextualised to on-ground users and makes a real difference in supporting and building community resilience, the Business Case is being developed with an explicit '*Research, Development and Utilisation*' focus.

Three main strategies through which the purpose and objectives of the Human Dimensions Research Cluster/Network could be achieved were presented to the second workshop and subsequently refined as follows:

STRATEGY 1: Facilitating Applied Research Initiatives

- Facilitating the development of strategic, utilisation-focused, priority 'human dimension' research initiatives that address issues of national, state and regional interest, but most importantly are guided by, support and enable community resilience.

STRATEGY 2: Collaboration and Strategic Analysis

- Building relationships and creating space to evolve a different way of understanding and engaging in a changing world.
- Promoting collaboration, coordination and multidisciplinary partnerships to maximise investment on priority needs, focus research on applicability, minimise duplication of effort, and increase adoption of outcomes.

STRATEGY 3: Knowledge into Practice

- Facilitating the translation and utilisation of existing and new knowledge in ways that support and enable community resilience.

These are being further developed in the draft Business Case, for review by the Alliance and Core Group.

Cluster Activities

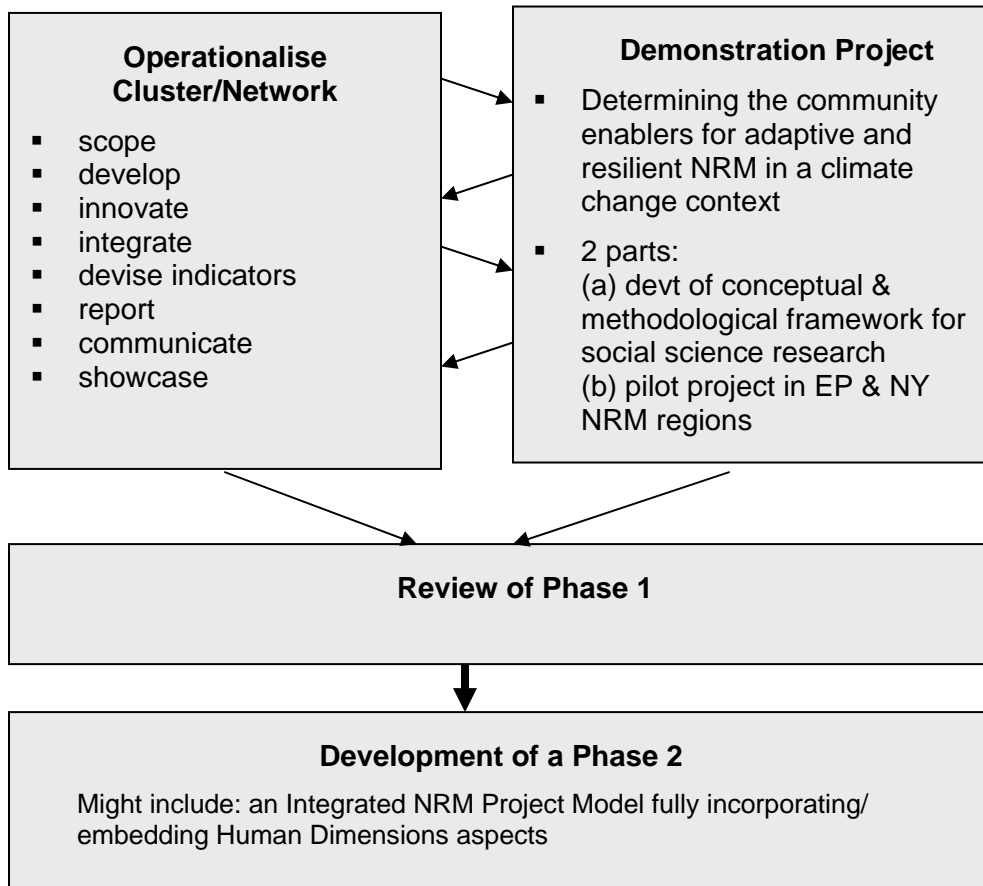
Indicative activities as developed during the first workshop were grouped as follows and are inter-related. These were circulated for review at the second workshop. While no further structured development occurred, discussion at 4th August workshop reflected matters of activity content and process that were a feature of the 24th workshop.

<p>Identification & Profile</p> <p>- of 'human dimension' needs, priorities, opportunities, researchers, cluster...</p>	<p>Innovation</p> <p>- fostering innovation in HD research; inspiring new ways of viewing issues and creating solutions; change-enablers...</p>	<p>Engagement</p> <p>- as a key research topic; implications for research and NRM practice within a changing context...</p>
<p>Knowledge Management</p> <p>- clearing house role, translation & transfer of research, database coordination, knowledge broker...</p>	<p>Communication</p> <p>- across the HD network, with NRM and other research stakeholders, different forms and modes...</p>	<p>Advocacy</p> <p>- of the HD need in NRM, lobbying for resources, political leverage, research and application leverage, champions...</p>
<p>Technology</p> <p>- database devt, facebook, forums, managing different forms of knowledge...</p>	<p>Capacity Building</p> <p>- skills in social research; boundary-rider roles; seed funding; action-research processes...</p>	<p>Pilot Projects</p> <p>- NRM needs as driver and beneficiary of social research; integration of HD aspects into research and practice; MERI...</p>

Proposed 2009 – 2011 Priority Activities

Two key inter-related activities are proposed to be undertaken by the Human Dimensions Research Cluster/Network from 2009 – 2011.

These were largely mapped out during the first workshop, and were summarised for presentation at the second workshop in the following diagrammatic form. These directions were confirmed as an appropriate way forward for the Cluster.



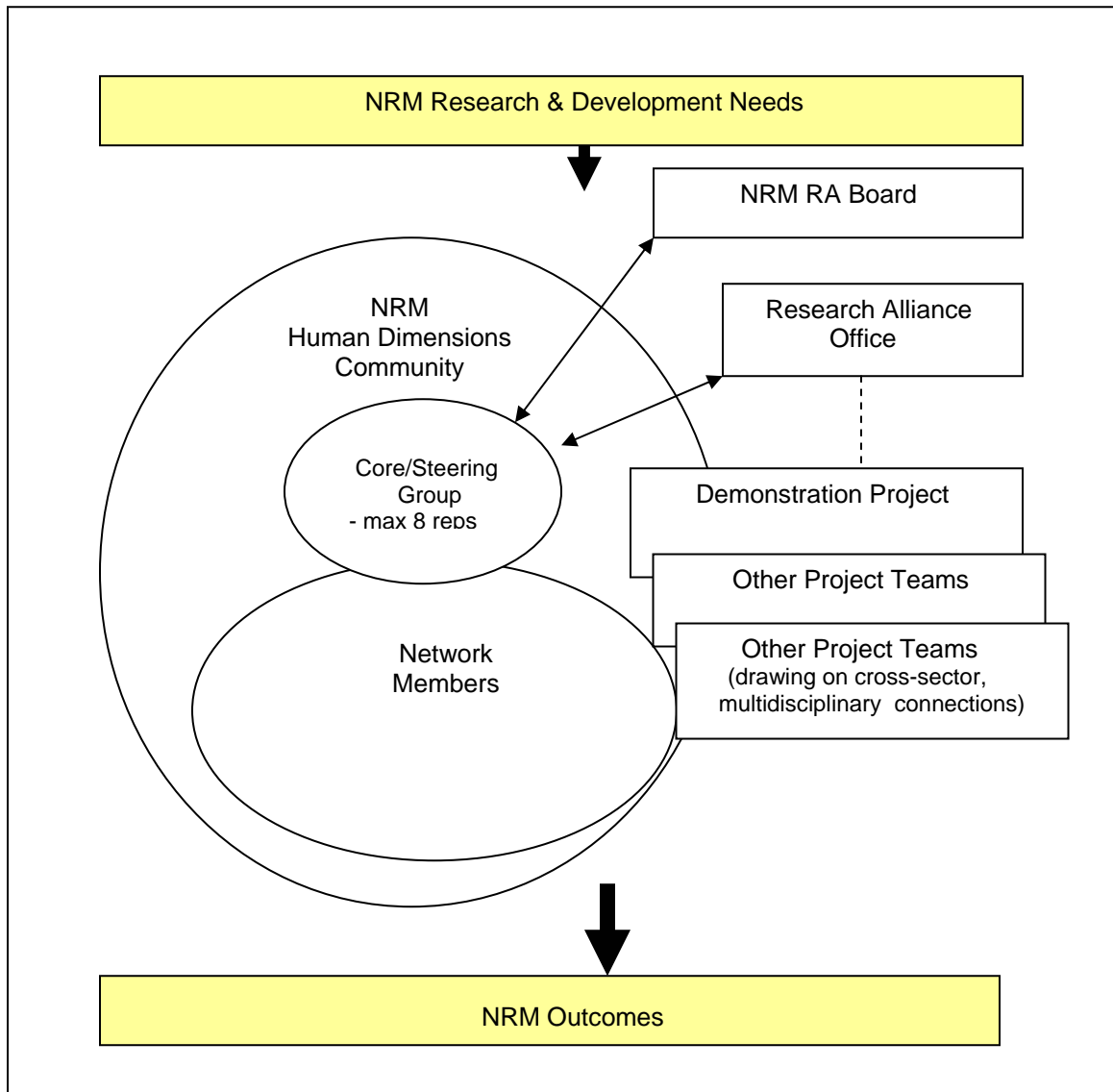
Other key HD Cluster functions to be developed during 2009 - 2011 include:

- a communication strategy
- a MERI (monitoring, evaluation, reporting/communication and improvement) strategy
- a marketing and promotions strategy

It is envisaged that development and application of these with respect to Cluster functions could be undertaken in a way that piloted them for use in integrated NRM projects.

Proposed Governance Arrangements: Organisational Model

The following diagram captures the structure of the Cluster and key relationships as developed in conjunction with workshop participants.



Core/Steering Group members, as nominated at the second workshop, are:

- Merv Lewis (Chair)
- Guy Robinson & Janet Dibb-Leigh (University of SA)
- Andrew Beer; Jonathan Sobels, Claire Smith & Heather Burke (Flinders University)
- Deborah Keighly-James (DFEEST)
- Stephanie Williams (DEH)
- Greg Cock & Lib Hylton-Keele (PIRSA) – to be confirmed
- Jill Woodlands & Terry Peacock (NGO sector)

It was recognised that other representatives may be sought (eg. Local Government, end-users), while others have expressed interest but were not at the workshop.

7. Conclusion and Key Recommendations

The scoping and preparatory process has confirmed:

- a strong need and urgency for ‘people dimensions’ research in NRM, and has highlighted specific priority directions and opportunities
- that there is a clear, unique, cross-cutting role for a Human Dimensions Research Cluster
- that in facilitating research in this domain, it must be utilisation-focused and grounded in supporting and enabling community resilience
- that operation of this Cluster will require a different, more flexible and innovative approach

In progressing the establishment of the Human Dimensions Research Cluster, it is recommended:

- That the Cluster be actively supported and strongly championed by the Alliance and other key partners in advocating for support from and leverage with policy, planning and program stakeholders; this will require an informed, coordinated approach.
- That contributory funds are sought from stakeholders but that this should not preclude engagement or prevent initiatives from progressing; some of the most innovative outcomes emerge from resource-poor situations.
- That the identified and agreed priority need for research that is applied and that is guided by, supports and enables community resilience be strongly supported and stimulated; this should be reflected in the promotion and utilisation of participatory action research and related approaches.
- That the proposed two-pronged strategy of undertaking practical pilot research initiatives in tandem with strategic statewide policy and planning work be supported, and be underpinned with a well-considered framework and plan of action to ensure maximum advantage accrues from this.

Annexes

See separate files.