

Reviewing the Monitoring and Evaluation Practices and Perceptions of Australia's Regional Natural Resource Management Organisations

A dissertation submitted by
Lucy Richardson, B. Eng-Env (Hons)

For the award of Masters of Business Research
University of Southern Queensland
2012

Supervisor: Dr Geoff Cockfield, USQ

Abstract

Established under a joint venture between the Australian Government and the individual state and territory governments, Australia's regional natural resource management (NRM) organisations have been the primary structures for delivering NRM investment programs across Australia. The quantity of investment devolved through these organisations places significant accountability pressure on them and requires them to evaluate the impacts of their programs. Despite the increasing volume of literature about these NRM bodies, no previous review has established a baseline of the regional bodies' evaluation practices and capabilities on a national scale.

This research reviews the monitoring and evaluation drivers, barriers and practices of these regional bodies. Findings include the identification of two main driver factors (improvement and maintenance), two barrier factors (skills and resourcing, and technical) and three practice factors (monitoring and evaluating intermediate outcomes, appropriateness of investment aspects, and need and benefit). The majority of regional bodies were operating within the higher level expanded contextual (25 percent) and constitutive and bounded rationality (58 percent) evaluation model groups. The results suggest that very few regional bodies are operating within the more narrowly focused organisational excellence (11 percent) and political and symbolic (6 percent) evaluation model groups. Evaluation capabilities and culture were also high across the regional bodies in line with the high level evaluation models generally being applied.

A review of the influence of the statutory status of the regional bodies, which applies in some states, identified statistical differences between the evaluation barriers and models of statutory and non-statutory regional bodies but not between their drivers, practices, capability, culture, satisfaction levels or partnerships.

Important relationships of relevance for the future evolution of this sector were also identified through the analysis and include links between the presence of corporate strategic planning and organisation size and the higher level evaluation models.

Certification of Dissertation

I certify that the ideas, experimental work, results, analyses and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award.

Signature of Candidate

Date

ENDORSEMENT

Signature of Supervisor

Date

Contents

List of Figures	v
List of Tables	vi
1 Introduction	9
1.1 Context	9
1.2 Policy problem	10
1.3 Research problem.....	11
1.4 Methods of analysis.....	13
1.5 Scope of the study.....	14
1.6 Overview of this thesis.....	14
2 Literature Review.....	16
2.1 Natural Resources Management	16
2.2 Regional Arrangements in Australia.....	17
2.3 Evaluation.....	24
2.3.1 The evolution of evaluation.....	25
2.3.2 Evaluation Characteristics of Individuals and Organisations...	26
2.3.3 Reviews of Natural Resource Management in Australia	35
2.3.4 Evaluation in Australian natural resource management.....	36
2.4 Conclusions from the literature	44
3 Methodology	47
3.1 Scope of the Research	47
3.1.1 Target population.....	47
3.1.2 Sampling.....	47
3.2 Organisational Demographics	49
3.2.1 Statistical assumption testing	50
3.3 Regional Body Survey.....	50
3.3.1 Survey design	50
3.3.2 Survey distribution and management	52
3.3.3 Social desirability bias management	53
3.3.4 Data compilation and formatting	53
3.3.5 Limitations.....	53
3.4 Analysis.....	54
3.4.1 Methods used in other studies	54
3.4.2 Grouping regional bodies	55

3.4.3	Status of Regional Body Evaluation	56
3.5	Conclusions	59
4	Results	61
4.1	Grouping of Regional Bodies	61
4.1.1	Demographics	61
4.1.2	Monitoring and evaluation drivers	63
4.1.3	Barriers to monitoring and evaluation	66
4.1.4	Partnerships	69
4.1.5	Satisfaction and planned changes.....	71
4.1.6	Conclusion	72
4.2	Status of Regional Body Evaluation	73
4.2.1	Current monitoring and evaluation practices	74
4.2.2	Evaluation models	78
4.2.3	Evaluation capability.....	85
4.2.4	Evaluation culture	86
4.2.5	Conclusion	91
4.3	Results conclusions	93
5	Discussion	96
5.1	Regional Bodies: Grouping and Evaluation Status	96
5.1.1	Demographic characteristics.....	96
5.1.2	Drivers	98
5.1.3	Barriers and satisfaction.....	99
5.1.4	Practices	101
5.1.5	Models	103
5.1.6	Conclusion	105
5.2	Regional Body Evaluation Capability Aspects	105
5.2.1	Barriers and Practices.....	106
5.2.2	Barriers' and Models.....	107
5.2.3	Satisfaction and Improvements.....	107
5.2.4	Capability	109
5.2.5	Culture	109
5.2.6	Conclusion	111
5.3	Governance structure relationships.....	112
5.3.1	Structures	112
5.3.2	Barriers, drivers and practices	112

5.3.3	Evaluation models	113
5.3.4	Capability and culture	114
5.3.5	Conclusion	114
5.4	Discussion conclusions	114
6	Conclusion	116
6.1	Context and research problems	116
6.2	Summary of findings.....	117
6.3	Methods and limitations	121
6.4	Implications for policy, practice and future research	121
7	References	124
	Appendix A: Statistics	1
	Appendix B: Survey form	1

List of Figures

Figure 2.1:	Model effectiveness continuum	29
Figure 2.2:	Expanded model effectiveness continuum	31
Figure 2.3:	Program evaluation capability hierarchy	33
Figure 2.4:	Sharp’s organisational evaluation capability hierarchy	33
Figure 2.5:	Evaluation culture creation and causation	35
Figure 2.6:	Evaluation capability and culture.....	43
Figure 3.1:	The 56 NRM regions of Australia	48
Figure 3.2:	State/Territory representation in survey sample	49
Figure 3.3:	Model group assignment framework.....	58
Figure 4.1:	Regional body demographic clusters	62
Figure 4.2:	Monitoring and evaluation drivers’ levels of importance (n=36)	64
Figure 4.3:	Driver factors influence map	65
Figure 4.4:	Monitoring and Evaluation barriers’ levels of influence (n=36)	67
Figure 4.5:	Barrier factors influence map	69
Figure 4.6:	Overall levels of partner involvement.....	70
Figure 4.7:	Satisfaction with current monitoring and evaluation practices	71
Figure 4.8:	Current monitoring and evaluation practices (n=36)	74
Figure 4.9:	Current monitoring and evaluation practices factors map.....	78
Figure 4.10:	Accountability driver by model group	80
Figure 4.11:	Program improvement driver by model group.....	81

Figure 4.12: Outcome tracking driver by model group	81
Figure 4.13: Highlighting success driver by model group.....	82
Figure 4.14: Sourcing funding driver by model group.....	82
Figure 4.15: Community engagement driver by model type.....	83
Figure 4.16: Reporting to community driver by model group	83
Figure 4.17: Informing policy drivers by model group	84
Figure 4.18: Evaluation capability scores distribution.....	86
Figure 4.19: Evaluation capability scores by Model	87
Figure 4.20: Evaluation culture scores distribution	88
Figure 4.21: Evaluation culture scores by Model	88
Figure 4.22: Evaluation culture aspect - Commitment to evaluation roles	89
Figure 4.23: Evaluation culture aspect - Incremental processes.....	89
Figure 4.24: Evaluation culture aspect - Strategic application of evaluation	90
Figure 4.25: Evaluation culture aspect - Link to experts.....	90
Figure 4.26: Evaluation culture aspect - Contribution to knowledge	91

List of Tables

Table 2.1: Government funds for regional bodies as proportion of total revenue.....	23
Table 2.2: Proportion of regional bodies with Government funds over 80% of total revenue.....	23
Table 3.1: Demographic representation in survey sample	48
Table 3.2: Model-driver relationships	57
Table 3.3: Evaluation culture score	59
Table 4.1: Summary of demographic characteristics of survey sample.....	61
Table 4.2: Significant driver correlations (Spearman's Rho).....	64
Table 4.3: Initial driver factor grouping dominance	66
Table 4.4: Driver factor grouping dominance (within 1 point difference) .	66
Table 4.5: Significant barrier correlations (Spearman's Rho) (n=36)	68
Table 4.6: Barrier factor grouping dominance (within 1 point difference)	69
Table 4.7: Satisfaction scores	72
Table 4.8: Practice mean rankings.....	74
Table 4.9: Significant correlations between practices and drivers.....	75
Table 4.10: Significant practice correlations (Spearman's Rho) (n=36)	76

Table 4.11: Practice factor grouping dominance (within 1 point difference)	78
Table 4.12: Model distribution by statutory status	79
Table 4.13: Model-driver allocation confirmation	79
Table 4.14: Significant model correlations with practices	84
Table 4.15: Capability scores by statutory status	86
Table 4.16: Practice factor scores for incremental change	91
Table 5.1: Model distribution by statutory status	104

Acknowledgements

Special acknowledgement and much thanks goes to Geoff Cockfield of the University of Southern Queensland for his on-going support and regular prompting for progress. This research would never have been completed without him. Thank you also to the University of Southern Queensland for supporting my presentation of this research at the Australasian Evaluation Society conference in 2010.

Penny Hamilton has also provided significant support through promotion of this research as part of my role within Condamine Alliance and by encouraging me to continue when I really wasn't so sure. Also thanks to Condamine Alliance for supporting this arrangement and for assisting me to present this research at the Australasian Evaluation Society conference and my proposed presentation at the National NRM Knowledge Conference in 2012.

Acknowledgement also goes to the management and staff of the regional bodies who undertook to return completed surveys. Without this support the research would have never got off the ground. Your time and interest is greatly appreciated. Hopefully you will find much of interest in the findings of this research.

Final acknowledgement goes to the awesome family that made themselves cheese on toast because I was too busy writing to cook and gave me a hug when I was so frustrated with my progress – or lack thereof.