
Engagement between SA's regional
Natural Resource Management bodies
and Non-Government Organisations

Conservation Council of South Australia
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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'T' and 'K'.

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Executive summary

Non-government organisations (NGOs) play a pivotal role in natural resource management (NRM) in South Australia. By reflecting ‘community values, passions, expectations and aspirations’¹, NGOs are able to use their direct links with members, constituents and/or collaborators to implement a range of on-ground, educational and scientific projects.

To achieve significant NRM outcomes, NRM bodies² and NGOs need to engage effectively with each other. Effective engagement from NRM bodies will be based on an understanding of NGO needs, capacity and functions as well as any issues that may be perceived by NGOs as a barrier to engagement.

The need for effective engagement is even more pressing with the establishment of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (July 2010) which aims to integrate delivery of environmental protection and NRM in SA. One of their key elements to achieve this is ‘through an increased emphasis on collaborating, partnering and engaging local communities’³. This marks further evolution to the NRM structure in SA.

The integration process does provide an opportunity to build in improvements to build the culture of community engagement so support the broadest ownership of the NRM culture in South Australia. To that end, the findings in this report can assist in this process.

This report documents findings from a survey undertaken in 2010 by Conservation Council SA and provides recommendations to NRM bodies to strengthen engagement with NGOs by providing an increased understanding of NGO structure and function, including:

- how and why NGOs operate;
- the internal capacity and composition of NGO; and
- how these various demographics influence their preferred methods of engagement.

A total of 92 environmental NGOs were surveyed from all NRM regions in South Australia except Alinytjara Wilurara. NGOs were selected to represent the range of organisational types and environmental activities undertaken throughout the state,

¹ *The Mutual Agreement* between SA Non-Government Environmental Organisations and Natural Resource Management Boards p. 7

² NRM bodies is used in this document to mean NRM Boards, NRM Groups and State Government agencies

³ Government of South Australia, 2010 *‘Improving Natural Resource Management in South Australia: Regional Integration of South Australia’s Environment and Natural Resource Management Delivery’*, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Adelaide

including NGOs involved with coastcare, landcare and bushcare activities, Friends of Parks, peak bodies and some Progress Associations.

This survey also re-examined barriers to NRM engagement identified by NGOs in the Conservation Council of SA's 2007/08 survey.

Key findings: NGO demographics and preferred engagement methods

From the large representative sample of NGOs surveyed, it was discovered that South Australia's environmental NGOs are incredibly diverse in their governance structures, age of members, purpose, length of operation, size, activities and areas of interest. The survey's findings include:

- NGOs had on average 140 volunteers, but if national, statewide and Local Action Planning groups are excluded, then the average size is 35 with 47% of these regarded as active volunteers.
- 76% had no staff, 15% had less than 2 FTE staff and 9% have more than 2 staff.
- 42% handled less than \$5000 per annum and smaller NGOs are more likely to handle less annual income.
- 72% used grant monies to operate and deliver projects and 29% were solely reliant upon grants with no other source of income.
- 45% obtained some form of income from membership fees.
- 18% of NGOs have informal meeting structures, 51% have formal meeting structures, 7% had a paid coordinator and 10% identified alternative structures such as operating under the auspices of Friends of Parks or Local Government.
- 59% had volunteers involved in their NGO who belonged to generation Y (i.e. under 31 years of age).
- 54% of time is spent on on-ground works, 13% on education, 10% on reporting and administration, 8% on lobbying, 7% on planning and 6% on capacity building.

Despite the limited financial and human capacity of NGOs, 55% said they would be interested in having a role in implementing NRM plans. About 23% recognised that they are already involved in implementing actions, targets or objectives in the NRM plan. It is not clear whether some NGOs are not aware they are implementing NRM plans or this was interpreted to mean having specific contracts with NRM.

In relation to how NGOs currently are and would like to be engaged, there were some interesting findings particularly in relation to preferred methods of correspondence and the ability to apply successfully for grant applications. For example:

- There appears to be a correlation between successful grant applications and those who are engaged with NRM personnel.
- There appears to be a correlation between successful grant applications and NGOs who receive more frequent NRM correspondence.
- There were many comments in relation to the difficulties of grant processes.
- Of those surveyed, 70% want to engage at the NRM Project Officer level, 32% at NRM Group level, 32% at NRM Board level, 8.7% at NRM Council level and there were 7 NGOs not currently engaged who want to engage with NRM bodies.

- Most NGOs require 1-3 months' notice for notification of events and grant applications.
- There was a resounding lack of interest in social networking (e.g. Facebook) as a form of communication and engagement, with only 16% expressing any interest.
- Face-to-face communication was seen as most valuable and effective (41%).
- Whilst email was an acceptable form of communication for most NGOs, there were many comments about the need for information to be sent by post, (especially larger documents such as plans) so NGOs can distribute them to other members who are not online or do not have computers.

Key findings: Perceived barriers to engagement

In the 2007/08 survey, 79% of NGOs surveyed identified some form of barrier to engaging in SA's regional NRM processes. In this survey, 36% of NGOs believed there were barriers to engaging in the NRM process and 31% perceived no barriers. It therefore appears that NRM bodies may have addressed some of the barriers previously identified. This may also be a result of the fact that fewer groups responded to this survey and only a small proportion of those originally surveyed in 2007/08 responded to this survey.

The barriers identified by survey participants in 2010 as still significant (i.e. where more people agreed it was a barrier than those who did not) include:

- limited volunteer time to engage;
- bureaucracy within NRM processes and bodies;
- difficulties with reporting, administration and grant processes;
- lack of administrative support; and
- poor communication (although there was a fairly even split between those agreeing and disagreeing that this was a barrier).

The majority of NGOs surveyed did not consider the other barriers identified in the 2007/08 survey to still be of significance. These include:

- lack of on-ground support;
- not understanding the relevance of NRM;
- misalignment of priorities;
- insincere engagement;
- not recognising the contribution of volunteers; and
- poor relationship between local government and NRM.

Although most NGOs did not perceive these to be significant barriers, there were some isolated comments relating to these barriers.

Other barriers identified in the 2010 survey included:

- over-use of NRM terminology;
- NRM bodies failing to utilise and acknowledge local knowledge; and
- uncertainty of roles and responsibilities.

The perception of bureaucracy, lack of volunteer time and difficulties with grant and reporting processes are still significant barriers to engagement with NRM bodies and processes. A number of recommendations made in the 2007/08 survey were strongly supported and these are listed below in order of support from the NGOs surveyed:

- diversify engagement methods;
- simplify funding processes;
- provide adequate on-ground support;
- establish simple communication protocols; and
- ensure purposeful, sincere and timely consultation.

Implications for engagement

To be most effective, NRM engagement approaches must reflect the variety of sizes, functions, interests and capacity of NGOs. This includes using a diversity of communication methods including face-to-face and hard-copy postal distribution. It needs to be noted some NGO members do not have computers, or internet access, or have slow download speeds.

As well as being diverse in structure and capacity, NGOs are interested in a wide range of natural resources issues, from biodiversity to climate. They are also involved in NRM from many perspectives, including on-ground works, education and advocacy.

Younger volunteers (i.e. individuals under 30 years of age) are involved in NGOs, although not in large numbers. As many NRM bodies actively engage school groups, they may have a significant role to play in encouraging enthusiasm in youth and promoting involvement with NGOs through tertiary institutions and schools.

The interest of NGOs in delivering and implementing aspects of NRM Plans underscores the importance of engaging them. It is possible many NGOs do not realise they are already implementing aspects of the NRM plans and NRM bodies could increase this perception through improved communication and education, as well as ensuring targets and objectives are worded using plain English.

Many comments were made regarding the difficulties with grant applications, reporting and administration. Since NGOs are highly reliant on grants, emphasis should be placed on providing additional support and better communication of grant opportunities. This includes ensuring timely correspondence, adequate notification and suitable methods of distributing information, recognising it can take time for information to be received and disseminated amongst members. An investigation into whether grant processes and paperwork can be simplified without compromising transparency and accountability may be useful. Where NGOs are unsuccessful in their grant applications, follow up by NRM bodies could help to ensure engagement opportunities are not lost.

Recommendations

In addition to reinforcing many recommendations of the 2007/08 survey, the 2010 survey highlights some additional areas for attention to further enhance the engagement approaches of NRM bodies with NGOs. In particular is a need to address the issue of lack of time and capacity of NGOs by ensuring a collaborative approach is taken, providing additional support and simplified processes in order to maximise opportunities for NGOs to participate. A collaborative approach between NRM and NGOs rather than a 'tiered' approach is a priority to reduce the perception that the NRM bodies are above community providing all the support and advice – communication and influence needs to work in both directions.

In addition to the recommendations made in the 2007/08 survey, the following recommendations for NGO engagement have been developed to reflect findings from the 2010 survey:

- harness and value knowledge and expertise of community groups;
- work collaboratively to maximise opportunities for NGO participation;
- ask NGOs how they want to be involved and at what level;
- provide a diversity of communication methods;
- ensure documents are written in 'plain English';
- ensure it is clear to NGOs not traditionally perceived as environmental organisations that they can have a role in NRM;
- ensure engagement processes are simple;
- simplify or provide assistance with grant writing and reporting processes.

As the new NRM delivery support services and community engagement services are developed through the integration process, it will be important to clearly define the relationships between NGOs, the delivery services and NRM boards. For a large majority of activities and services, NGOs would expect to engage with the services organisation, however, there will also need to be clearly defined communication pathways for dealing with issues that may arise at a more strategic and planning level, or where particular difficulties and challenges arise. *The Mutual Agreement*⁴ and its associated templates is one such tool that could be utilised to identify pathways forward for effective collaboration across a range of scales.

These recommendations could be developed further into a set of principles for collaboration or a memorandum of understanding, in partnership with relevant agencies and NRM bodies.

⁴ *The Mutual Agreement* between SA Non-Government Environmental Organisations and Natural Resource Management Boards

Introduction

Non-government organisations (NGOs) play a pivotal role in delivering natural resource management (NRM) in South Australia. Volunteers contribute substantially to the state's economy and provide a significant contribution to the social and environmental wellbeing of local communities and the state. This is particularly pertinent for the NRM sector where NGOs implement many tangible outcomes through on-ground activities and significantly influence behavioural change within society, through education and advocacy activities. In order for NGOs to achieve high-level outcomes, NRM bodies and NGOs need to engage effectively with each other.

This report is intended to assist NRM bodies, and other relevant agencies, in effectively engaging NGOs, by providing findings regarding current engagement and recommendations for future engagement.

The first aim (Part 1) of this report focused on addressing a key recommendation that arose from the Conservation Council's 2007/08 survey (Woodlands et al, 2009⁵); that engagement should be diversified to take into account differences in NGO sizes, needs, capacity and structures. As such this report provides the survey results aimed at providing an increased understanding of NGO structure and function, including:

- how and why NGOs operate;
- the internal capacity and composition of NGOs; and
- how these various demographics influence their preferred methods of engagement.

Analysis of the demographic variations within the environmental NGO sector was used to determine current and preferred engagement methods.

The second aim (Part 2) of this report was to investigate whether the barriers identified in the 2007/08 survey are still applicable and whether NGOs perceived any other issues in engaging with NRM bodies. There was interest in testing whether the barriers would be less significant given that regions have undergone consultation processes for the regional plans, thereby developing more constructive partnerships and relationships with environmental NGOs. Part 2 also evaluated whether the recommendations made in the 2007/08 survey are still relevant or whether there are other methods NRM bodies could adopt to ensure successful engagement.

The results of this survey, as well as lessons from the 2007/08 survey (Woodlands et al, 2009); have guided the development of recommendations for engaging NGOs.

2007/08 survey findings

The 2007/08 survey was conducted via telephone to investigate the dynamics of NGO engagement in regional NRM processes including a qualitative exploration of perceived barriers to engagement. The survey interviewed 140 NGOs from seven NRM regions.

⁵ known hereon in as 2007/08 survey.

Of those surveyed only 15% saw no major barriers to engaging with regional NRM processes and approximately 79% identified barriers. The major barriers perceived by survey respondents (in order of frequency mentioned) included:

- lack of understanding of the relevance of NRM Boards to NGO activities;
- high levels of bureaucracy of NRM Boards;
- poor communication between NRM Boards and NGOs;
- lack of volunteer time to engage with NRM Boards at the level required;
- difficulties with funding processes;
- poor access to NRM staff for administration and on-ground support;
- lack of willingness and 'sincerity' of NRM Boards to engage;
- difficulties with reporting and the level of administration required;
- poor recognition of the contribution of volunteers;
- misalignment of priorities between NGOs and NRM Boards;
- limited volunteer capacity and inadequate number of active members in smaller NGOs to delivery on-ground works; and
- lack of Local Government links available for smaller NGOs.

From these barriers, five recommendations were suggested, including a need to:

- diversify methods to engage with NGOs taking into account differences in size, needs, capacity and structure;
- employ enough on-ground community support officers to support the work of smaller volunteer NGOs;
- establish clear, open and simplified communication channels to create trust and enable the formation of relationships and partnerships;
- ensure consultation is purposeful, sincere and timely to support collaboration with NGOs; and
- simplify funding processes so they are secure, equitable and transparent; acknowledging that the administrative capacity of NGOs is at times a barrier to successful application and reporting processes.

Survey methodology

Questionnaire construction

Written surveys were sent to environmental NGOs after a phone call to clarify details and ascertain their willingness to participate. The survey questions are shown in Appendix I.

To simplify the survey process and remove bias during the analysis process, open-ended questions were limited. In Part 1 (Q1-6) most questions provided set responses as well the opportunity to specify 'other' responses.

In Part 2 of the survey (Q7-8), the barriers and recommendations generated from the 2007/08 survey were tested using the Likert scale using bipolar responses to a statement ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree (Likert, 1932). Results were analysed by looking at the skew (or bias) towards either disagree or agree responses. This methodology is one of the most widely used scaling measures to evaluate social attitudes (Likert, 1932; Himmelfarb, 1993). To minimise any bias due to acquiescence, a variety of positive and negative statements on the 'barriers' identified in the 2007/08 survey were used in the survey.

Some open-ended questions were incorporated that extended beyond the original survey objectives. The results of these additional questions have been included in the raw data (Supporting Document) and discussion included in this report where it relates to NGO engagement.

Survey participants

The survey was conducted between April and August of 2010 with NGOs across the state in all NRM regions, except the Alinytjara Wilurara region. The NGOs were selected from existing databases held by NRM Boards and the Conservation Council of SA. The survey included some NGOs that were previously surveyed in 2007/08 along with some NGOs not previously surveyed. The overlap between the number of NGOs surveyed in 2007/08 and this survey in each region is shown in Table 1, see below.

The survey also aimed to cover a range of NGO types. NGOs are generally organisations that are not part of local, state or federal government or commercial industries, defined as a group of people who work together to pursue collective goals.

In many cases NGOs are regarded as synonymous with voluntary, community based, not-for-profit organisations with activities being non-commercial in nature. However, there are some groups regarded as NGOs that may contradict these generalisations. For example, although not commercial per se, some NGOs sell products and merchandise to obtain funding and a number of NGOs have paid staff in addition to their voluntary member base. Likewise, there are a number of community-based groups that operate under the auspice of local or state government, such as Friends of Parks.

NGOs that were surveyed were considered environmental NGOs. Environmental NGOs are any non-government group that undertakes environmental activities whether those

traditionally referred to as environmental NGOs such as Friends of Parks, Coastcare and Landcare groups or a group that may occasionally be involved in projects of environmental benefit such as fishing associations, boating clubs and progress associations.

The number of NGOs surveyed from these non-traditional groups was limited to those on existing databases. This therefore presented a limitation in analysing their responses separately to traditional environmental NGOs, but any discrepancies have been noted in the discussion.

Table 1. NGOs surveyed from each region.

NRM Region	# NGOs surveyed in 2010	# NGOs also surveyed in 2007/08	# NGOs surveyed in 2007/08
Kangaroo Island (KI)	4	1	2
Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges (AMLR)	33	12	35
Eyre Peninsula (EP)	6	4	17
Northern and Yorke (NY)	15	5	19
SA Arid Lands (SAAL)	1	0	3
SA Murray Darling Basin (SAMDB)	14	6	22
South East (SE)	6	2	14
Statewide and cross-regional*	13	10	28
Alinytjara Wilurara	Not surveyed	Not surveyed	Not surveyed
Total	92	40	140

* nb. Statewide and cross-regional includes NGOs that were difficult to allocate to a particular region such as NGOs who focus activities in the gulfs, as well as those NGOs that operate at a national or global level.

Key findings and interpretation

The key findings have been divided into two sections. Part 1 covers results relating to NGO diversity and preferred engagement processes. Part 2 shows the survey responses to the perceived barriers and recommendations from the 2007/08 survey. The survey was not designed to be used for regional comparison, although survey responses have been divided based on their regions if notable differences were evident.

Tabulated raw data and some preliminary analysis are available on request as a supporting document.

PART 1: NGOs' diversity and implications for engagement

NGOs delivering environmental outcomes in SA are incredibly diverse in governance structures, age dynamics, purpose, length of operation, size, activities and areas of interest.

NGO interests and focus

NGOs with a wide range of environmental interests were surveyed (Figure 1, Appendix II). Most NGOs initially formed for a very specific purpose. In several cases NGO interests have diversified (i.e. 5 NGOs surveyed started by lobbying on a specific local issue and their role has now widened to include more diverse aspects of biodiversity conservation) and some NGOs started for purposes other than environmental with their focus shifting to environmental issues later.

This highlights the need to engage with NGOs not traditionally perceived as environmental as NRM engagement may change these NGOs' attitudes and focus and result in more volunteers actively protecting natural resources.

NGO structures

Governance structures of NGOs vary substantially: 18% of NGOs are volunteers with informal meeting structures (e.g. they get together on an ad hoc basis or regularly but without formal processes), compared to 51% of NGOs who were voluntary groups that had a formal meeting structure. Only 7% of surveyed NGOs had a paid coordinator. About 10% identified alternative structures such as operating under the auspice of Friends of Parks or Local Government (e.g. Section 41 of Council).

The governance structure of a NGO may have implications for engagement as some NGOs may only forward on correspondence through their formal meeting processes and so getting correspondence to NGOs may take time to reach other NGO members.

NGO capacity (including volunteer numbers and staffing)

The majority of NGOs are small (Figure 2, Appendix II). On average NGOs had 140 volunteers of which 60% were considered active. National and statewide NGOs who had volunteers in the thousands may have skewed this figure. If national, statewide and Local Action Planning groups (who also have a large volunteer base) are excluded, then the average volunteer number is only 35.5, with 47.5% of these regarded as active. Thus

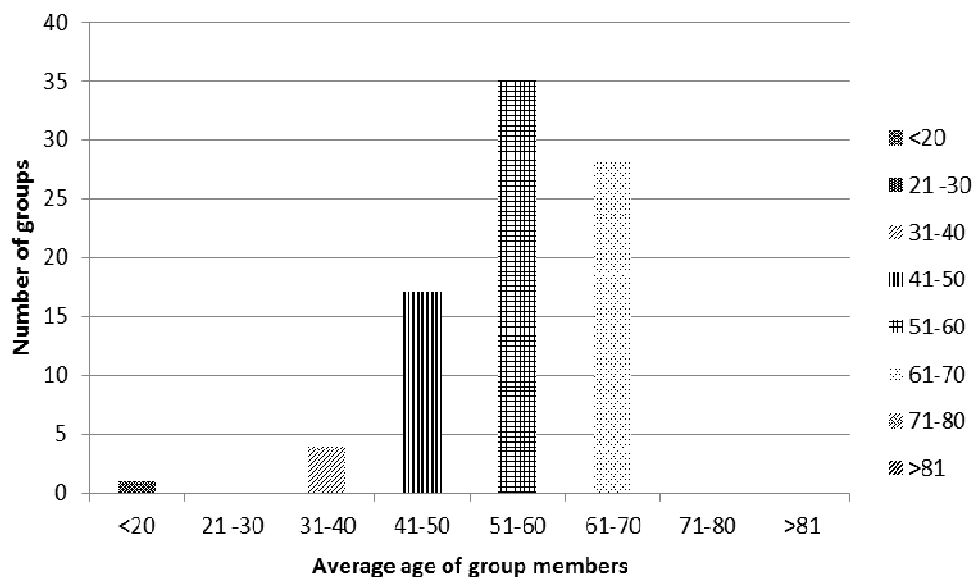
on average the majority of NGOs surveyed only had an active human resource capacity of 17 people.

Based on those NGOs surveyed, 76.1% of NGOs have no staff, 15.2% have less than 2 FTE employed and 8.7% have more than 2 FTE. On average, staff size was 3.4 FTE. This was skewed by one national NGO with 200 staff.

NGOs encompass a wide range of ages from school age to over 80 (Figure 3). The 2007/08 survey and one comment in this survey raised the issue of ageing volunteers. Of those surveyed, 54 NGOs (58.6%) had people involved in their NGO who belonged to generation Y (e.g. under 31 years of age). Younger volunteers seem to be present, even though not in large numbers, so it appears that in over half of the NGOs there is still some successional development of volunteers for the future.

Many NRM bodies are actively engaged with school groups and so they may have a significant role to play in encouraging enthusiasm in youth and promoting community groups through tertiary institutes and school; however, career age brackets are traditionally limited in their volunteer engagement in Australia (2000 ABS data shows over 75s and 25-34 years to have the lowest volunteer rates) (ABS, 2001). Providing assistance (e.g. providing extra hands to undertake works) for aging groups and helping to maintain momentum (e.g. social get-togethers with other NGOs etc.) may also help alleviate the feeling by some volunteer NGOs that their organisation is losing ‘steam’ (Woodlands et al, 2009).

Figure 3. Average age of surveyed NGO members.



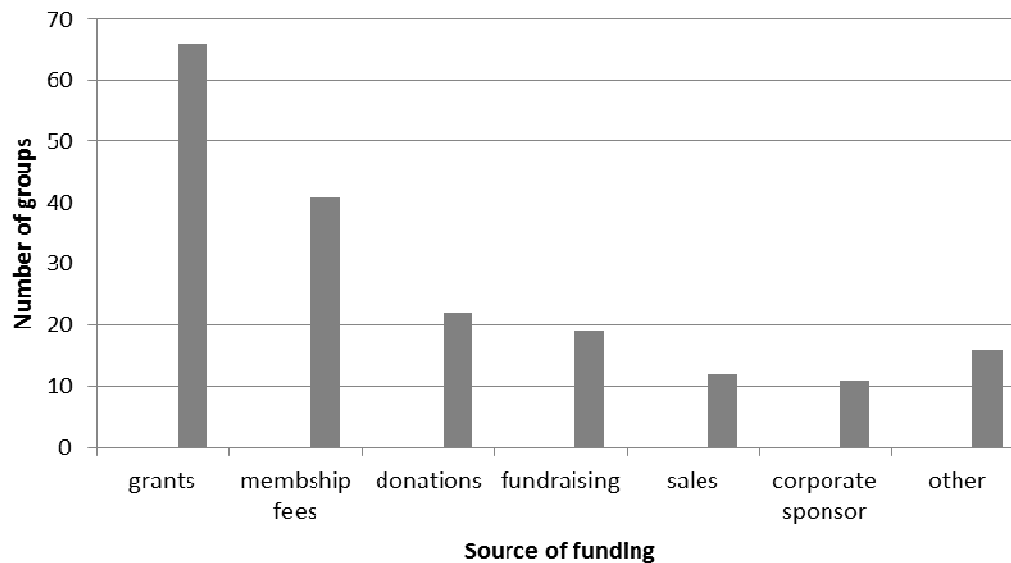
Of the four NGOs that had an average age of 31-40 years all were metropolitan based and were involved with advocacy activities. Therefore, regional NRM Boards may encourage youth involvement in NRM by supporting advocacy related activities.

NGO income and funding sources

Environmental NGOs typically have limited income with 42% handling less than \$5000 per annum. The smaller NGOs are inclined to handle less annual income. This is possibly because obtaining and managing income is dependent on internal NGO capacity.

Of those NGOs surveyed, 72% relied on grants to operate and deliver projects and almost one-third (29%) were solely reliant upon grants with no other source of income. Only 44.6% obtained some form of income from membership fees (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Source of NGO funding.



Therefore, NGOs ability to access grants could mean the difference between NGOs existing or not. The more staffing and project delivery becomes internalised within NRM Boards the more likely it is that some community groups will fold. To support NGOs it is vital to make grants easy to access (e.g. issues with paperwork, timing of notifications are mentioned below) and reduce the insourcing of regional target delivery.

NGO activities

The proportion of NGO time spent on various activities is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Time spent on various activities.

Activity	Avg. % of NGOs' time spent on activity
On-ground works	53.9
Education	13.3
Lobbying	7.9
Planning	7
Capacity Building	5.6
Grant applications	5.1
Reporting	4.6
Other	1.8

Nb. Figures 5 -10 (Appendix II) illustrates the amount of time NGOs surveyed spend on various activities within the regions.

Many of the comments regarding ‘other’ activities can be categorised as planning, education or capacity building including meetings, newsletters and administration. There was also one comment about socialising, and it is recognised this can be an important part of NGOs activities.

Whilst on a regional level, the NGOs’ area of activity was still predominantly on-ground works, there were some variations between regions. NGOs in the Northern and Yorke, South East and Eyre Peninsula appear to have a greater focus on on-ground work activities and education, whilst advocacy roles become more important in other regions (refer to Figures 5 – 10, Appendix II).

There was feedback from non on-ground orientated NGOs about lack of funding and support for other activities such as education and advocacy, which were considered just as important for natural resource management by these NGOs. Some NGOs suggested that threat abatement for certain areas should be about lobbying against developments not ‘planting trees’.

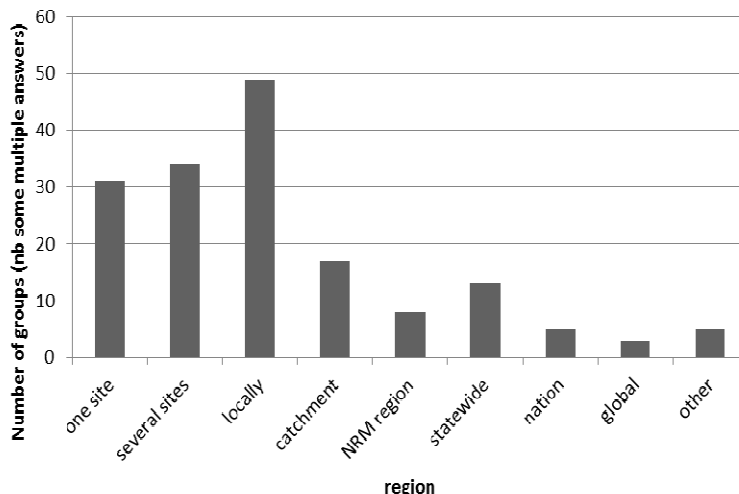
“Initially on ground works (mostly removal of boxthorns and other weeds and large scale revegetation) were the predominant activity. Threats have changed. Weeds are still a serious threat and revegetation still occurs of more threatened plants species, however activity is often more educational, promotional and lobbying. Main threats now come from developers, government and councils wanting to destroy our hard work and from human mismanagement as the site is highly accessible.” [AMLR survey respondent]

Around 55% of NGOs surveyed said they would be (or already are) interested in having a role in delivering the NRM plan.

NGO scale of operation

Most NGOs surveyed, operated at a local level either at one or several sites as shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11. Scale of operation of NGOs surveyed by geographic region.



Communication and engagement methods

Level of engagement

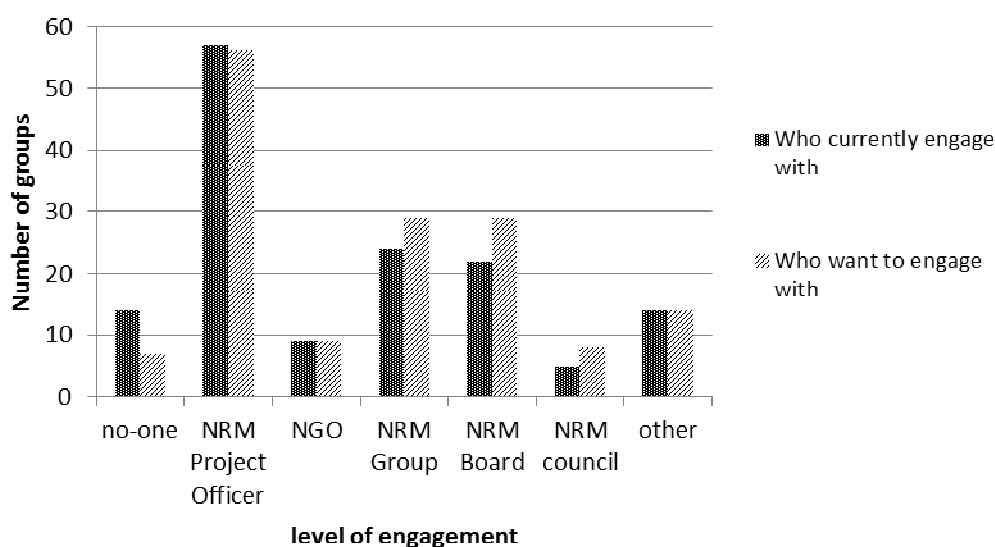
Most NGOs are already engaging at the level desired (Figure 12, Appendix II). Most NGOs are engaged at the NRM Project Officer level and wish to maintain this engagement; however, there are some NGOs that also want to engage at a higher level in the NRM hierarchy. For example, 5 NGOs wanted to engage with NRM Groups who aren't already engaged at this level, 7 NGOs want to engage NRM Board who aren't already and 3 NGOs want to engage at the NRM Council level who aren't currently engaged at that level. There were 7 NGOs who were currently not engaged with NRM Board at all, but want to engage. There was a prior assumption that peak NGOs or NGOs operating at larger scales would be more inclined to want to engage at the NRM Board or Council level and those operating on specific sites would be more inclined to want to engage with NRM Project Officers. This wasn't the case and there were no noticeable trends between the various demographics such as NGO size and the level they wished to engage. The level NGOs wish to engage is shown in Table 3 and Figure 12 below.

Table 3. Level NGOs wish to engage with NRM bodies and processes.

NRM Level	% NGOs wanting to engage at specified level
NRM Project Officer	60.9
NRM Group	32
NRM Board	32
NGOs	10
NRM Council	8.7
Do not wish to engage	7.6
Other	15

Nb. The other category included local council, Local Action Planning groups, State Environmental Minister and other government agencies or peak organisations.

Figure 12. Current level of NRM that NGOs engage and level they would prefer to engage.



Timing of correspondence

For most information, NGOs reported that they required 1-3 months' notice (Figure 13, Appendix II). This is particularly important for notice of funding opportunities. If there is less than 2 months' notice of grants then this will potentially exclude over half (53%) of NGOs from applying for funding as they said they needed more than 2 months' notice for grants. As discussed further below, there were many comments regarding the lack of notice as a reason for not applying for grants. The size and structure of a NGO does not appear to impact on the amount of notice that is required for grants and other information.

There were a few comments from survey respondents regarding emails not being forwarded on in a timely manner and some NGOs said they only shared correspondence at committee meetings, which may not be that regular. These factors can influence the time required for notification of events.

Methods of correspondence

Overall NGOs stated that the most effective and valuable form of communication was:

1. face-to-face (41%)
2. email/ electronic (28%)
3. newsletters (16%)
4. post (10%)

Over half of the NGOs who said electronic correspondence was the most effective form of communication also mentioned the need for a diversity of communications (e.g. 'email with more regular face-to-face contact').

Communication methods preferred by NGOs vary depending upon various demographics parameters and the purpose of the communication.

Those NGOs who prefer non-electronic information are more likely to have an income of less than \$5000/annum and are less likely to have paid staff compared with those who are comfortable with e-mail correspondence only.

Email is generally a more acceptable form of communication for larger NGOs. There were many comments from NGOs about the need for information to be posted, especially larger documents such as plans, so NGOs can distribute them to other members who are not online or do not have computers.

For the provision of technical information, newsletters and the internet become a more acceptable form of communication (26% and 18% of NGOs respectively are happy with these forms). In comparison for notices these correspondence mechanisms range between 10-14% respectively. There are a high number of NGOs who prefer information to be posted as well, or instead of, email (30% prefer post for technical information).

Email becomes a more accepted form on communication of grant information (43% are happy with email only).

Only 27% of NGOs were happy to receive NRM plans via email only. Postal correspondence becomes important for planning documents.

Email was a more widely accepted for notification of events with 43% of NGOs happy with email correspondence only.

Newsletters become more acceptable for update on Board activities (26%). There were 23.9% of NGOs who still required non-electronic forms of communication for this type of information.

“Direct communication is preferred by our group. Not all members have computers and access to email/internet, some have only recently purchased home computers. The telephone and a human voice is what our members most appreciate and feel comfortable with.” [SAAL survey respondent]

“postal is important as most information that comes through email we need to print out and circulate” [AMLR survey respondent]

“emails are easily forgotten, so post is more visible and able to be seen by several” [AMLR survey respondent]

“email is good but word of mouth to our people as they are mostly older and want human contact” [SAMDB survey respondent]

“face-to-face communication so long as they actually listen and follow up information and requests and don't put themselves on a pedestal. Need diversity of communication methods. Nb. plans need to be hard copy. A lot of our older volunteers don't have email or computers and so if they are to be engaged we need printed copies of information and planning documents.” [AMLR survey respondent]

“Personal 1:1 consultations and advice by an organisational mentor who has a clear picture of our organisation in terms of its developmental stage, results of a clear Needs Assessment and monitoring progress toward our strategic development, reflecting a composite of the State NRM plan & our own developmental plan.” [AMLR survey respondent]

“varies - longer technical documents are best hard copy either posted as a report or contained in a newsletter (documents which need to be circulated amongst our members need to be in hard copy as well as electronic because not all members have internet access)” [KI survey respondent]

Social networking/ alternative engagement strategies

Although there is an increasing interest in social networking, such as Facebook and Twitter to become part of communication strategies and used as a tool to quickly distribute information to large numbers of people. There was a resounding lack of interest in Facebook from those NGOs surveyed. Only 16% expressed any kind of interest, while 60% were not at all interested. Some NGOs were not interested, but did recognise that Facebook and social networking might have a role in attracting younger volunteers.

*“ [facebook] may be useful for members who use this facility now or in future, not currently viable, ok with stream of notices re events, dates for the diary, updates on activities, as long as we don't miss out on info we should be receiving.”
[AMLR survey respondent]*

“If we had a reliable young person to take on this responsibility we could be interested - as it is most appropriate to communicate with & recruit younger members.” [AMLR survey respondent]

“Facebook does not provide enough depth of communication. It is not designed for this. Not everyone is comfortable engaging with a group such as the NRM this way.” [AMLR survey respondent]

“group members have trouble handling email traffic. We tried facebook but it became overwhelming” [AMLR survey respondent]

“access to X & Y gens might make this [facebook] necessary”[SAMDB survey respondent]

“starts off with a lot of enthusiasm but fades out over a short time” [AMLR survey respondent]

Many NGOs commented on slow internet speeds and one NGO commented that they only got a website late last year, so it needs to be recognised that community groups may not be taking up these recent trends as quickly as other sectors nor have the internet capacity to adopt alternative social networking strategies.

Those that did express some interest in social networking such as Facebook were generally those NGOs with more of an advocacy role.

Value may still exist in using social networking tools to tap into younger community members and disseminate information quickly, but further investigation would be required to determine whether such techniques are viable in the natural resources management sector.

Grant processes

The awareness of NGOs to various grant and award opportunities are shown in Figure 15 (Appendix II). When asked why NGOs did not apply for grants the main responses were the lack of adequate notification and complexity of grant processes (including application, managing funds and reporting). There were also some NGOs who said they had no current need for funding or the amount of funding on offer or activities covered by funding did not match what their NGO needed to carry out their natural resource management activities.

NGOs that were most likely to be aware of a grant and successful with their applications were more likely to be engaged with NRM bodies or have their own staff and thus greater internal capacity. For example, of those who were successful in their grant applications:

- 90% were engaged with NRM Project Officers, NRM Board or NRM Groups;
- 75% had direct NRM Project Officer support for their NGO; and
- 40% had their own paid staff.

This is shown Figure 16 (Appendix II).

Those that were successful and received NRM grants were also more likely to have more timely correspondence. With the small state grants, the major issue noted was the lack of notification; and with the Caring for Our Country grants, many NGOs felt they were not eligible.

There were some discrepancies in the responses provided for success of various awards such as the Civic Trust Awards and Landcare Awards. However, there were some comments made by NGOs regarding the time taken to complete these application forms, the feeling that NGOs were not eligible or that they were not bothered about receiving recognition.

PART 2: Review of perceived barriers to engagement and recommendations

Review of perceived barriers

In the 2007/08 survey, 78.6% of respondents identified some form of barrier to engagement, whilst only 15% saw no barriers. In the current survey, 31.5% believed there were no barriers to engaging in SA's regional NRM processes and 35.9% perceived some barriers (Figure 17, Appendix II). It therefore appears that NRM bodies may have addressed some of the barriers previously identified. This may also be a result of the fact that fewer groups responded to this survey and only a small proportion of those originally surveyed in 2007/08 responded to this survey.

NGOs operating at a statewide level are the most likely to perceive barriers to engagement in NRM processes (Figure 19, Appendix II) and comments regarding cross regional issues made by NGOs further supports this. Only 10% of statewide NGOs surveyed perceived there were no barriers to engagement. SAMDB, AMLR and EP tend

to be the regions where there is a greater perception of barriers to engagement (see Figure 18, Appendix II for AMLR).

Responses to specific barriers

The barriers tested in this survey are shown below in order of significance, based on the responses to this survey.

1. Limited time to engage (72% agreed or strongly agreed this is a barrier; 32.6% strongly agreed).
2. Lack volunteer capacity (75% agreed or strongly agreed; 27.2% strongly agreed).
3. Lack volunteers to implement on-ground works (68% agreed or strongly agreed; 31.5% strongly agreed).
4. Bureaucracy (51% agreed or strongly agreed that there is a high level of bureaucracy; 25% strongly agreed. Only 4.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 20, Appendix II)).
5. Difficulty with reporting and administration required (45% agreed or strongly agreed that they had difficulty with the level of reporting and administration; 16.3% strongly agreed).
6. Difficulty funding processes (43% agreed or strongly agreed that they had difficulty with funding processes; 13% strongly agreed).
7. Poor communication (33% agreed or strongly agreed there is poor communication; however, the number who disagreed was comparable with those who agreed or strongly agreed (Figure 21, Appendix II)).
8. Lack of administrative support (30.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had good access to NRM staff for administration; 10.8% strongly disagreed).
9. Understanding of relevance (28.2% disagreed or agreed that they understood the relevance of NRM Boards; 9.7% strongly disagreed).
10. Lack of on-ground support (22.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had good access to NRM staff for on-ground support; 8.7% strongly disagreed).
11. Relationship between NRM Boards and local government (19.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed that there were good relationships, however it should be noted that 34.8% were unsure).
12. Recognise the contribution of volunteers (15.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed that NRM recognised the contribution of volunteers; 5.4% strongly disagreed).
13. Sincere engagement (12% disagreed or strongly disagreed that NRM engaged in a sincere way; 4.3% strongly disagreed).
14. Misalignment of priorities (9.8% disagree that NRM priorities align with their NGOs).

It appears that issues surrounding local government and NRM relationships, lack of on-ground support, recognising volunteer contributions, understanding the relevance of NRM and conducting sincere engagement were not identified as being of major concern to those groups surveyed. Note, however, this may also be because fewer groups

responded to this survey and only a small proportion of those originally surveyed in 2007/08 responded to this survey.

There were some comments made regarding these issues; however, more NGOs thought they were not an issue than those who thought they were. These previously perceived barriers have not been explored in any further detail in this report.

Regarding the relevance of the NRM Boards to NGO activities, although overall there is no evidence this is a pressing barrier, there were some comments made and some clear differences in responses between regional NGOs which are also explored in more detail below.

In the 2007/08 survey, the relevance of NRM Boards was the most frequently reported barrier to engagement. Many NGOs were previously unaware of NRM Boards or did not understand their relevance to their activities. This previous result was expected given the survey was undertaken in the early stages of NRM Boards and Groups establishment. It should be noted that only one NGO surveyed suggested they were unaware of NRM bodies and processes. The results from this survey showed more NGOs were aware of the relevance of NRM Boards than those who weren't convinced of NRM Board's relevance. Whilst this is not perceived as a major barrier overall, there was some differentiation between regions with AMLR, SAMDB and Statewide NGOs reporting a greater tendency to perceive this as a barrier. There were some comments made by NGOs in these regions that might provide an explanation for these anomalies.

“Not everyone needs money for weed control and fencing. NRM bodies need to ask groups what they need to assist them in contributing towards NRM through their group's activities.” [AMLR survey respondent]

“Several members also suggested that engagement barriers have increased recently, with the NRM board becoming less relevant to the community in general. [EP survey respondent]

“As a very small group, we have found it impossible to find a place within any of the funding initiatives, because of our location and size of the group.” [AMLR survey respondent]

“NRM boards do not understand the benefits in engaging state and national NRMs if it's outside their boundaries” [Statewide survey respondent]

“Our group would like NRM to have a much greater environmental advocacy role, and have increased funding to carry out that role.” [SAMDB survey respondent]

These and other quotes suggest that some NGOs might not see the relevance of NRM Boards as they do not feel they fit into the perceived NRM 'mould'. The perception that NRM Boards cover certain areas, catchments or issues needs to be addressed if Boards are to successfully engage with all NGOs. If there are limitations imposed by NRM

bodies on who can apply for grants or become involved with NRM activities, the logic of this needs to be made more transparent to the public.

The AMLR, SAMDB and Statewide NGOs had a higher than average percentage of NGOs involved in advocacy activities and the first quote would indicate that perhaps NGOs feel NRM Boards are only interested in funding on-ground activities. If NRM Boards are to ensure they are perceived as relevant to NGOs undertaking natural resource management activities, then there is a need to promote NRM bodies as more than just a funding body for on-ground works and ensure that NGOs are aware that community groups are not excluded due to their size, location or structure.

Those barriers still perceived to be significant by respondents (i.e. those where more people saw it as a barrier as opposed to not) are discussed in more detail below.

Barrier 1, 2 & 3: Lack of volunteer time and capacity to engage with NRM Boards and deliver on-ground works

This appears to be the greatest barrier with NGOs primarily operating on a voluntary basis.

Addressing this barrier will require a two-fold approach from NRM bodies. Firstly, NRM bodies could potentially have a role in promoting NGOs and attracting more volunteers and secondly in initiating contact and adopting processes that make engagement simpler. This may include proactively contacting NGOs who aren't supported directly by NRM Project Officers to determine whether they have any issues they want to discuss, information they want to share and what their current needs are; rather than waiting for NGOs to make contact when they need funding or assistance. This may be an area where NRM Groups could play a key role. Also attending NGO meetings, whenever possible, may provide a beneficial engagement opportunity.

There was no discernible difference between volunteer capacity either between regions or between NGO sizes.

Barrier 4: High levels of bureaucracy of NRM Boards

In the 2007/08 survey this was the second most reported barrier and in this survey perceived bureaucracy was second only to lack of volunteer time and capacity to engage and undertake works.

Further investigation may be required to ascertain what NGOs consider to constitute 'bureaucracy'. Bureaucracy may include lack of funding filtering down to NGOs, top-down approach, confusion over roles and responsibilities and lack of transparency. The lack of NGO capacity and time may also influence the way in which they respond to perceived bureaucratic processes.

"Happy for the board to be a top down funding agency but the process of strategy building and priority setting needs to be bottom up. The term consultation reads as more top down process which is not working...there is a significant lack of community involvement to local strategy and priority setting." [AMLR survey respondent]

"The bureaucracy should be reduced to allow more on ground staff, support and funding." [AMLR survey respondent]

"I guess perhaps our perception is that it involves lots of extra meetings/bureaucratic processes, when we are more interested in practical specific projects?" [Statewide survey respondent]

"...too many chiefs not enough Indians" [SAMDB survey respondent]

"too much money is spent on jobs and not enough on jobs to do on-ground works" [SAMDB survey respondent]

"NGO, community and individual efforts/knowledge/skills need proper recognition as they have much to contribute to effective partnerships. ' Top-down approaches' and Authoritarian master/slave relationships" [Statewide survey respondent]

"There is a distrust of government bodies including natural resource management boards that overrides the good work that is undertaken by a few. This means that the NRM Boards need to rely more heavily on "Community NRM Delivery Groups" but enable them to be autonomous and then engagement will be effective." [AMLR survey respondent]

"If landcare groups are a principal resource for on ground works why are they not included in strategy formulation and goal setting. No buy in = No support = No progress" [AMLR survey respondent]

“Short term funding, unsuitable contracts, delays in receiving funding, lack of transparent processes, inappropriate reporting requirements, lack of early consultation in planning processes” [Statewide survey respondent]

Barrier 5 & 6: Difficulty grant processes, reporting and administration

These two barriers have been considered together as they are often regarded as synonymous and NGOs reported a similar level of agreement that this was a barrier to successful engagement. In Part 1 of this survey, a large number of NGOs reported time limitations, lack of adequate notification and excess paperwork as the reasons why they did not apply for various grants. Another reason for not applying was that the funding did not address what NGOs need in order to achieve outcomes.

“[community groups] want to get funds annually - and at the time more \$ may be spent on weeds and the next month say spent on planting but to bid separately for all the different bids has deemed not to work. Nature sometimes bring on weeds before the planting season or dry seasons more needs to be spent on watering- community groups should receive funds and they disperse as they see best for that year.” [SAMDB survey respondent]

“Funding needs to be more diverse. Not everyone needs money for weed control and fencing.” [AMLR survey respondent]

“Dealing with excessive paperwork in applying for, reporting and acquitting grants is a major obstacle for small volunteer community groups.” [KI survey respondent]

A number of NGOs reported that grants need to be administered in a transparent manner with appropriate record keeping and ability to justify expenditure to the upper echelons of government.

“Although we do not advocate unnecessary paperwork, our group believes that accountability is a really important aspect of funded project work. Having specific milestones and project outputs keeps us very focused and makes our project easier to manage. Reporting is an important part of project delivery.” [SAAL survey respondent]

“I think that state based and NRM board funding processes are extremely simple at present and should not be changed. Federal Government Funding Programs are a bit more complex and difficult for volunteer groups to access and as such I feel these should be made simpler to accommodate volunteer group participation.” [SAMDB survey respondent]

A further review of grant application and reporting processes throughout the regions may assist in determining whether this barrier can be alleviated without compromising funding accountability and transparency. Alternatively, more active NRM body support may assist funding processes. In designing grant applications it needs to be recognised that some NGOs have not read NRM plans due to the length and complexity of the documents and overuse of 'NRM speak'. Subsequently questions in grant applications that ask applicants to link their activities to NRM plans can be onerous and prohibitive to successfully applying for grants.

Diversifying funding structures may also help address this barrier. Given the lack of volunteer time to implement on-ground works reported by some NGOs on-ground support could include non-financial incentives such as the Board employing contractors to help NGOs with activities and promoting the need for more volunteers especially for those NGOs experiencing an ageing volunteer base and volunteer 'burn-out'. It may also be possible to re-direct NRM Project Officer time towards assisting with reports and applications, although it is recognised by many NGOs that Project Officer time is already stretched. The financial management of grant monies was also noted as a barrier in the 2007/08 survey. An investigation into various administrative structures of grants might be suitable including regional NRM Groups administering funding so that NGOs just have to purchase the required materials or services and send invoices to an NRM body rather than having to track purchases and acquit funding at the end of the grant period. This also ties into the lack of administrative support reported as a barrier by NGOs.

Barrier 7: Poor communication between NRM Boards and NGOs

Responses were split between positive and negative responses, with only a very slight swing towards negative responses. This is therefore not perceived to be as significant an issue as others, but still warrants attention (see Figure 21, Appendix II).

Barrier 8: Poor access to NRM staff for administration

A number of NGOs made comments that they need more Project Officer support.

"In this area, there are few on-ground NRM staff. This is a funding issue is my guess." [EP survey respondent]

"NRM needs to commit to long-term to project officer support for our strategically conceived group - by this we mean at least 2 days funded project officer support per week, need specific project officer dedicated to coordinate the group" [AMLR survey respondent]

"number of staff and quality of staff [is a barrier]" [NY survey respondent]

"a single contact person for all matters would be useful" [SAMDB survey respondent]

The Project Officer support that is received by NGOs is generally appreciated and respected; however, there are some issues in respect to Project Officer turnover.

“...access to local officers who are prepared to build a rapport with our group is very important. We feel we have this in [...] and value his support highly.” [NY survey respondent]

“our groups gets excellent support from NRM Project Officers” [KI survey respondent]

“The changing of Support Officers who are usually engaged on a contract basis. We’ve had 3 already since I’ve been President. In speaking to our current Support Officer she admits to being thinly spread.” [AMLR survey respondent]

Addressing this barrier is difficult as NRM Project Officer time and the Boards’ ability to employ more staff may also be limited. A number of NGOs recognised these limitations faced by the NRM Boards. Some NGOs, as reported in the discussion on bureaucracy, feel that there are too many staff in the upper levels of NRM and not enough at the level to support NGOs.

Without additional investment to regional NRM bodies, it may be difficult for Boards to provide the level of engagement and support required by NGO as well as their own monitoring, planning and reporting requirements.

Other barriers

Two NGOs specifically mentioned the use of ‘NRM-speak’ as a barrier and a few NGOs mentioned NRM not appreciating and using local knowledge.

“Those with degrees or letters of some sort after their name need to realise and appreciate that older volunteers have a life time of experience and are usually keen to share their knowledge” [SE survey respondent]

“nrm board and project officers do not engage and use enough local knowledge” [KI survey respondent]

“sure NRM Boards give out awards, but they do not value volunteer knowledge. Volunteers are generally the experts at their sites and NRM project officers tend to get in and come across all high and mighty. Recognising volunteers is about valuing their input and listening genuinely, not giving out bits of paper in the form of awards” [AMLR survey respondent]

Other isolated issues identified included the issue of roles and responsibilities. This is something that may require clarification when partnerships are developed.

*“site and project/ program ownership is a difficult issue. Sometimes it is hard to work out who is responsible for what”
[Statewide survey respondent]*

*“The interrelationship between NRM, LAP, DEH, DWLBC, Friends of parks, SAMDB NRMB, is incomprehensible”
[SAMDB survey respondent]*

Review of recommendations made in 2007/08 survey report

Despite an apparent reduction in perceived barriers, there was still strong support for the recommendations made in the 2007/08 survey report. There were a variety of comments saying that engagement is already effective and these recommendations were already being implemented.

“Our group has had excellent support from our NRM Group and we have not experienced any barriers in engaging with the SAAL NRM at any level”. [SAAL survey respondent]

“I do not believe we have any barriers to NRM engagement, and community groups in our area have ample opportunity to engage in programs and projects” [SAMDB survey respondent]

“Where I agree with the recommendations above, I believe this is happening in our NRM region. I have agreed as I believe it should happen in all NRM regions” [SAMDB survey respondent]

“All good and it appears that some of these recommendations have been implemented.” [AMLR survey respondent]

*“there have been some noticeable improvements in the past 12 months from the AMLR and the Small Community (Weatherill) grants was a notable step in the right direction”
[AMLR survey respondent]*

At the same time, a few NGOs emphasised that these recommendations needed to happen.

“the recommendations are practical and necessary” [NY survey respondent]

Reponses to recommendations

The most strongly supported recommendation was the need for diversity of communication methods (53% strongly agree and 43% agree) and funding processes simplified (54%% strongly agree and 40% agree) and these were discussed in Part 1 and Part 2 above. More on-ground support was also supported (43% strongly supported and 36% supported).

Conclusion and recommendations

This review was intended to assist NRM bodies in effectively engaging NGOs by providing an increased understanding of NGO diversity, demographics, preferred engagement methods as well as review NGOs perception of barriers to engagement.

NGO diversity

Environmental NGOs are incredibly diverse. NGOs tend to be engaging at the level they would like, but there are a few that would like to engage at the NRM Board/ Council level whereas they are currently only engaging at the Project Officer level. There doesn't appear to be any correlation between NGO demographics such as size and the level NGOs wish to engage. NRM bodies should therefore not assume that smaller NGOs are content engaging at the Project Officer level.

NGO engagement and communication

The majority of NGOs require 1-3 months for all correspondence especially for documents for consultation or comment, submission and grants. Whilst email is a widely accepted form of communication, there were a number of NGOs preferring non-electronic communication. This is particularly the case for smaller, lower income NGOs without paid staff.

The preferred method of communication also varies with the type of information being disseminated. Postal distribution is generally preferred over email for planning documents and technical information.

Difficulty with grant processes was frequently raised. NGOs are more likely to be aware of opportunities, more likely to put in an application and more likely to be successful if they are engaged with NRM personnel. It is recommended that NRM bodies ensure follow up with NGOs who submit applications so potential engagement is not lost and determine whether there is other support NRM can provide.

Addressing these issues means communications need to be diverse and where possible tailored to the NGO's needs. Ensuring there is a clear point of contact for NGOs is an essential component of this. Whilst some trends are apparent, with many smaller low income NGOs requiring postal distribution of information, this was certainly not the case for all NGOs and it is recommended that NRM bodies ascertain with each NGO their preferred methods for communication and engagement.

NGO perception of barriers

The barriers still perceived by NGOs surveyed to be significant impediments to engagement include:

- limited time and capacity of NGOs to engage and implement activities;
- high levels of bureaucracy within the NRM system; and
- difficulty with reporting and administration especially as they relate to funding processes.

To a lesser extent, communication and the lack of access to NRM staffs for administrative support were reported to be barriers.

Limited NGO time and capacity could be addressed with a more proactive approach to engaging with NGOs that includes collaboratively determining the best methods of engagement and communication. This includes proactively contacting NGOs to see what their needs are, how NGOs can provide services and information to NRM bodies and vice versa. There was one NGO surveyed who said this survey was the first NRM related contact they had and yet their contact details were on the relevant NRM database. Along with proactively engaging with NGOs, processes for NGOs to be involved with NRM bodies should be streamlined and simplified including consultation processes such as submissions and processes to develop partnerships. NRM documents such as plans should be condensed and simplified for a community audience rather than lengthy, government-orientated documents that can be perceived as:

*“a good opportunity to fill a rather large filing cabinet”
[SAMDB survey respondent]*

It is possible that the perception of bureaucracy and ‘red-tape’ would be alleviated by simplifying granting processes and reporting required by NGOs. The other aspect of bureaucracy seems to be the lack of community involvement in developing strategies, projects and priorities, the perceived ‘top-down’ approach and the lack of money filtering to the ground, but rather being absorbed by NRM overheads and official procedures. At the same time, it is understood by many NGOs surveyed that NRM staff are already stretched financially and dealing with their own processes and procedures required by legislation and the upper echelons of government.

“Some good planning - identification of priorities etc. But NRM Boards/ DENR et are so poorly funded that most boards are unable to make a substantial difference” [Statewide survey respondent]

“A regional plan has been produced detailing NRM priorities but resources to implement it are extremely limited.” [KI survey respondent]

“We acknowledge that our board does seem more functional now and is working to best utilise still limited resources” [AMLR survey respondent]

“lots of enthusiastic and highly committed staff are engaged in education, on-ground works, biodiversity protection and other aspects of NRM. They also wrestle daily with unwieldy bureaucracy and woefully inadequate funding” [SAMDB survey respondent]

Addressing these issues may require further investigation on how NRM bodies can be presented as community-orientated as opposed to just another government body. There

is a need to reiterate that NRM Boards and Groups are comprised of community members. This may also need to be addressed at a level above the NRM Board, to determine how greater NRM staff time can be diverted to engagement, as opposed to processes; as both are not achievable to a high standard without additional funding and resources to NRM operations.

Ensuring a collaborative approach between NRM bodies and NGOs rather than a 'tiered' approach where NRM is perceived as above community providing all the support and advice will be important.

Simplifying grant processes can have multiple benefits in potentially reducing the perception of bureaucracy, freeing NGO time, increasing NGO capacity and ensuring NGOs are financially in a position to persist and be adequately resourced to continue the work they do. A review may be required to establish how grants can be simplified without compromising accountability and the ability to justify expenditure to government; however, there are a number of processes that can be adopted to ensure grants are more accessible, including:

- having greater lead in time for applications;
- providing greater Project Officer support to assist in application and report writing;
- ensuring grant applications do not require a comprehensive understanding of NRM plans and priorities; and
- avoiding grant processes that are reliant on word-smithing abilities that could potentially disadvantage NGOs who are time-poor or unable to mimic the 'NRM speak'.

Draft recommendations

The following recommendations for NGO engagement have been drafted as a starting point to be further developed in consultation with relevant bodies.

1. Harness and value knowledge and expertise of community groups

Community groups are generally experts in their areas. Knowledge should be valued and NRM staff should not place themselves above volunteers, but rather treat them as equals.

2. Work collaboratively to maximise opportunities for NGO participation

Working collaboratively and forming partnerships requires community to be considered on the same level as NRM bodies. Part of this is ensuring that delivery of NRM targets is not internalised and is shared equitably between sectors as was intended with a community-based approach to NRM.

3. Ask NGOs how they want to be involved and at what level

NGOs have a variety of interests and undertake different activities such as on-ground works, advocacy and education; all of which are vital to achieve sustainable management of natural resources. It should not be assumed that NGOs only want technical advice or funding. Advice on advocacy techniques, support in generating volunteer interest and funding for conducting educational workshops should all be

considered ways NRM bodies can support NGOs. Also, it should not be assumed that NGOs only want to engage at the Project Officer level, but may have interests in engaging with NRM Boards, NRM Groups and the NRM Council.

4. Ensure a diversity of communication methods

Email is not an acceptable form of communication for all NGOs, with many not having the capacity to distribute information to other members electronically or having the financial capacity to print and distribute information to other members. This includes making hard-copy documents available. Communication methods should be tailored to the NGOs need and 1-3 months should be allowed for most correspondence.

5. Ensure documents are written in 'plain English'

This includes improving readability (this can be roughly measured using MS Word's Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level), ensuring document structure is sequential, avoiding sentence convolution, passiveness and wordiness, ensuring document format is consistent and using examples and case studies to explain information. In addition, public documents should be succinct and bureaucratic terminology should be limited. The use of acronyms should also be limited for anything that may not be widely known by community.

6. Ensure it is clear to NGOs not traditionally perceived as environmental that they can have a role in NRM

This includes, but is not limited to, Progress Associations, Sporting and boating clubs and school groups.

7. Ensure engagement processes are simple

This includes grant, consultation and submission processes.

8. Simplify or provide assistance with grant writing and reporting processes

This includes simplification of the application and reporting processes and assistance where required, as many NGOs are time poor. Assistance in understanding the relevance and possible applications of grants may assist more NGOs in applying for grants.

Further investigations

Further investigation in the following areas may help increase the understanding of how NGOs can be successfully engaged:

- Review grant application and reporting processes relevant to environmental NGOs to analyse whether there is room to reduce the amount of paperwork and time required without compromising accountability and transparency.
- Investigation of NGOs understanding of bureaucracy to ascertain exactly what is driving the perception of bureaucracy in the NRM sector and what can be changed to address this.
- Determine principals appropriate for a collaborative approach between NGOs and NRM bodies.

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Appendix I – Survey questions

Question 1: Your group

A: When did your group first establish?

B: What was the reason your group first established?

C: Is the initial reason that your group started still relevant? Yes/ No

D: If not what has kept you going (i.e. what is your new focus)?

E: What on-ground environmental change does your group want to see?

F: Is your group incorporated? Yes/ No

G: Is your group a registered charity? Yes/ No

H: Is your group registered as not-for-profit? Yes/ No

I: Does your group have an ABN? Yes/ No

J: What best describes your group's governance structure

Overseen by an executive committee or Board

Volunteers with a paid coordinator

Volunteers with a formal meeting structure and processes

Volunteers who informally get together

Group is overseen by a CEO or Executive Officer

Other

K: Approximately how many of the following does your group have? Please note there may be overlap, with people in more than one category.

Volunteers

What percentage of these would you regard as active?

Paid Staff

Committee members

Paid individual members

Non-paid individual members

Paid group members

Non-paid group members

L: What is the total size of your group including staff, members and volunteers?

0-20

20-50

50-100

100-500

500-1000

1000-5000

>5000

M: What is the total size of your group including staff, members and volunteers?

- 0-20
- 20-50
- 50-100
- 100-500
- 500-1000
- 1000-5000
- >5000

N: What is the range of ages of your members (i.e. youngest member to oldest member)?

O: Approximately how much money does your group handle annually (including grants, membership fees, sponsorship etc...?)

- none
- \$1 - \$1000
- \$1,000 - \$5,000
- \$5,000 - \$10,000
- \$10,000 - \$25,000
- \$25,000 - \$50,000
- \$50,000 - \$100,000
- \$100,000 - \$500,000
- >\$500,000

P: What is your group's main source/s of income?

- Grants (please specify main grant source)
- Membership and subscription fees
- Donations/ Bequests
- Fundraising
- Corporate Sponsorship
- Product sales
- Other (please specify)

Q: Would you regard your group's primary area of concern as environmental?

R: If no, does your group do any environmental activities? Yes/ No

S: What issues are your group interested in?

- Terrestrial biodiversity conservation
- Catchment management
- Stream/ riparian/ wetland protection
- Coastal protection
- Marine protection
- Land care
- Sustainable farming
- Climate change
- Energy conservation
- Water conservation
- Other (please specify)

T: Approximately what percentage of each activity is your group involved with?

- On-ground works
- Education
- Capacity building
- Planning
- Lobbying
- Reporting
- Grant applications
- Other (please specify)

U: Across what geographic area does your group operate (you may tick more than one box)?

- At one site (please specify approximate size and nearest town to the site)
- At several sites (please specify # of sites, approximate size and general location)
- Locally
- Across a catchment
- Across a NRM region
- Statewide
- Nationwide
- Globally
- Other (please specify)

V: Do you have any other information about your group's structure and diversity you think NRM Bodies and other groups may find interesting?

Question 2: Your understanding of Natural Resources Management

A. What is your understanding of the term Natural Resource Management?

Question 3: Your current engagement with Natural Resources Management

In order to manage natural resources sustainably, the state has created a NRM Council, regional NRM Boards and NRM Groups. Please note all questions below are specifically relating to these NRM bodies, structures and processes.

A. What do you see is being achieved in NRM in your region/ area?

B. Does your group participate in any activities that are NRM related?

C. Who does your group have direct access to for support?

- No one
- NRM Staff/ Project Officer
- Local government staff
- NRM Group
- NRM Board
- Dept. Environment & Heritage staff
- Dept. Water Land & Biodiversity Conservation staff
- Other (specify)

D. Approximately how often do you receive correspondence from this person?

- Weekly Monthly
- Every 3 – 12 months
- Fortnightly
- Every 1 – 3 months
- Less than once a year

E. Approximately how often do you meet with this person/s

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Every 3 – 12 months
- Fortnightly
- Every 1 – 3 months
- Less than once a year

F. There has been a number of funding opportunities and award opportunities for NGOs during the past year. Have you been involved with any of the following?

	Were not aware of opportunity	Were aware but did not put in an application	Put in an application but were unsuccessful	Put in an application and were successful
Caring for our Country funding				
Small state grants				
Landcare awards				
Civic trust awards				
Grants direct from NRM Board				

G. If you were aware and did not put in an application what was the main reason for this?

H. Who do you currently engage with in NRM (you can tick more than one box)?

- Not currently engaged with NRM
- NRM Project/ Support Officer
- Peak NGO
- NRM Group
- NRM Board
- NRM Council
- Other (please specify)

4. Your group's engagement with NRM

A. At what level do you want to engage with NRM?

- Do not need or want to engage with NRM
- NRM Project/ Support Officer
- Peak NGO
- NRM Group
- NRM Board
- NRM Council
- Other (please specify)

B. Would you like to have a contact/go to person? Yes/ No

C. If so, who would you want as your main contact person (e.g. NRM Board, NRM Project Officer, NGO, Government department representative, local government representative)? This can be a specific person or a group.

D. Would your group like to have better links with other community environmental groups? Yes/ No

E. If so, what would this look like (e.g. who would you like to have better links with and how would these links exist)?

F. What is the best way to get the following information to your group?

	Email	Post	Discuss in person	Internet	Newsletter	Other
Technical information						
Grant information						
Plans for consultation						
Information on workshops/ education opportunities						
Updates on Board activities						

G. What do you see is the most effective and valuable form of NRM communication?

H. What do you see as the role of the State NRM Plan?

I. What do you see as the role of regional NRM Plans?

J. Does your group have a role in the delivery of regional NRM Plans?

K. Would your group like to have a role in the delivery of regional NRM Plans?

5. Facilities to assist engagement

A. Do you currently have a place to meet with fellow group members? Yes No

B. If you would like a space to meet, where would this ideally be? Specifically, what town and what type of building/ area you would like to meet. Name the building/ place if this is applicable.

C. What facilities are useful in a meeting location?

6. Your communication needs

A. How much notice should your group ideally be given to effectively participate and engage in the following:

B. Funding opportunities

- 1-2 weeks
- 2-4 weeks
- 1-2 months
- 2-3 months
- >3 months

C. Consultation for NRM plans

- 1-2 weeks
- 2-4 weeks
- 1-2 months
- 2-3 months
- >3 months

D. Information on workshops/ education opportunities

1-2 weeks 2-4 weeks 1-2 months 2-3 months >3 months

E. Writing submissions on development plans etc...

- 1-2 weeks
- 2-4 weeks
- 1-2 months
- 2-3 months
- >3 months

F. How many NRM related or environmental emails/ letters do you receive per week on average?

- < 5
- 6 - 10
- 11 - 20
- 21 - 30
- >30

G. Who are the majority of these emails/ letters from?

H. Is the amount of correspondence your group receives manageable? Yes No

I. How interested would you be in utilising social networking sites such as facebook?

- Not at all interested
- Somewhat interested
- Interested
- Very interested
- Unsure

J. Additional comments or suggestions for streamlining communications.

7. Barriers to NRM Engagement

A survey of NRM engagement was undertaken in 2007/08 and a range of perceived barriers to engagement were identified. Changes in NRM have occurred since this time and we wish to test whether these perceived barriers are still relevant.

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Unsure
A. Our group perceives no barriers to engaging in SA's Natural Resource Management (NRM) processes						
B. Our group has a good understanding of the relevance of NRM Boards to us						
C. There is a high level of bureaucracy in the NRM system at the NRM Board level						
D. There is effective communication between the NRM Board and our group						
E. Our group has limited volunteer time to engage with NRM Boards						
F. Our group has difficulty with funding processes						
G. Our group has difficulty accessing funding						
H. Our group has good access to NRM staff for administration						
I. Our group has good access to NRM staff for on-ground support						
J. NRM Boards engage in a sincere way						
K. Our group has difficulties with reporting						
L. NRM Boards recognise the contribution of volunteers						
M. NRM priorities align with our group's priorities						
N. Our group has a limited volunteer capacity						
O. Our group has a limited number of active volunteers						

P. NRM Boards have a good relationship with Local Government						
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8. Recommendations

The following recommendations were provided to NRM Boards based on the previous survey results.

Please indicate how strongly you agree with these recommendations.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Unsure
A. Methods to engage with NGOs need to be diverse and take into account differences in group sizes, needs, capacity and structures						
B. There needs to be more on-ground Community Support Officers to properly support the work of smaller NGOs undertaking NRM						
C. There needs to be simple communication methods and expectations need to be clearly spelt out to groups						
D. There needs to be purposeful, sincere and timely consultation to ensure it supports collaboration and partnerships with community through NGOs						
E. Funding processes need to be simplified so that they are secure, equitable and transparent, acknowledging that the administrative capacity of NGOs is at times a barrier to successful application and reporting processes						

F. Comments on the recommendations above or other suggestions.

Appendix II – Additional figures

Figure 1. Area of interest of NGOs surveyed by NRM region.

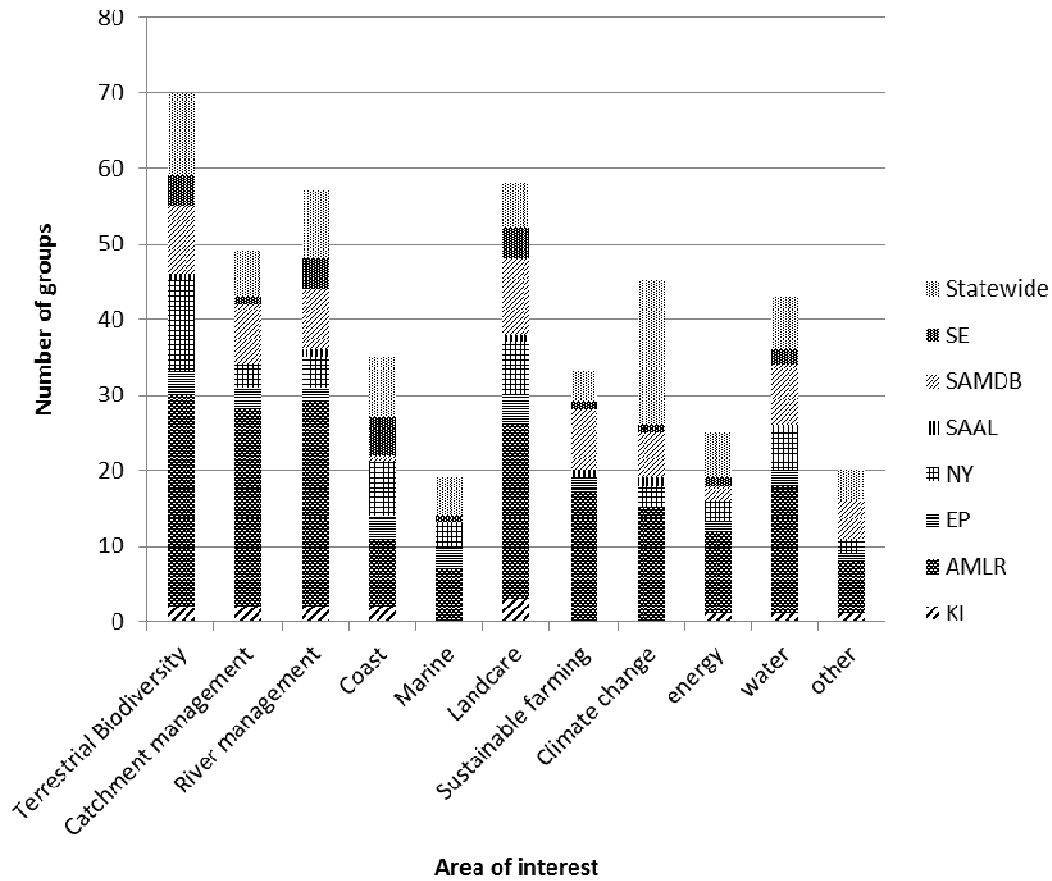


Figure 2. Overall group size (includes members, volunteers and staff).

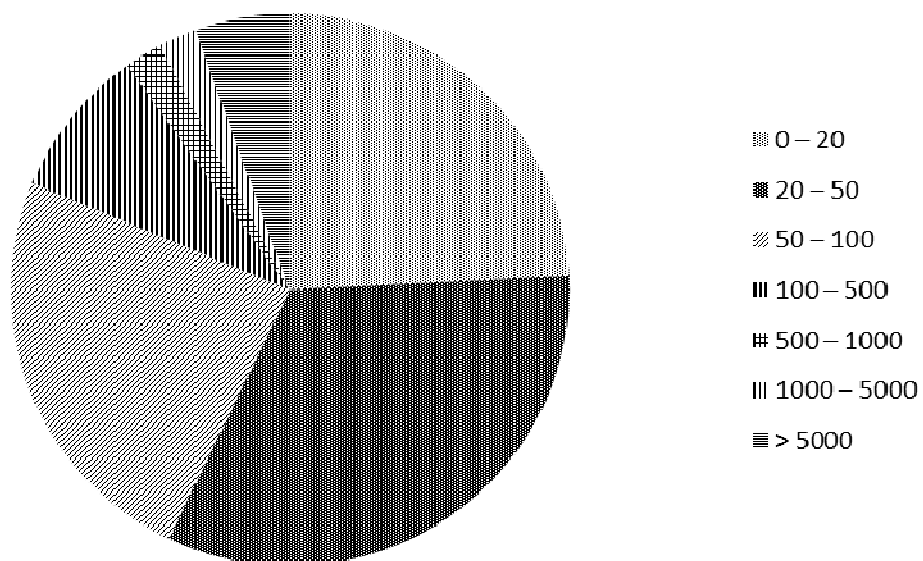


Figure 5. Area of activity of Statewide groups.

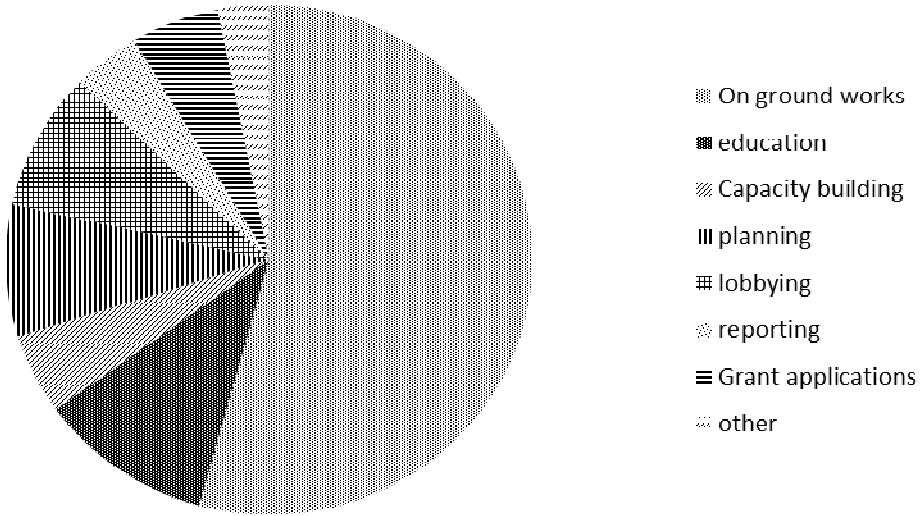


Figure 6. Area of activity of AMLR groups.

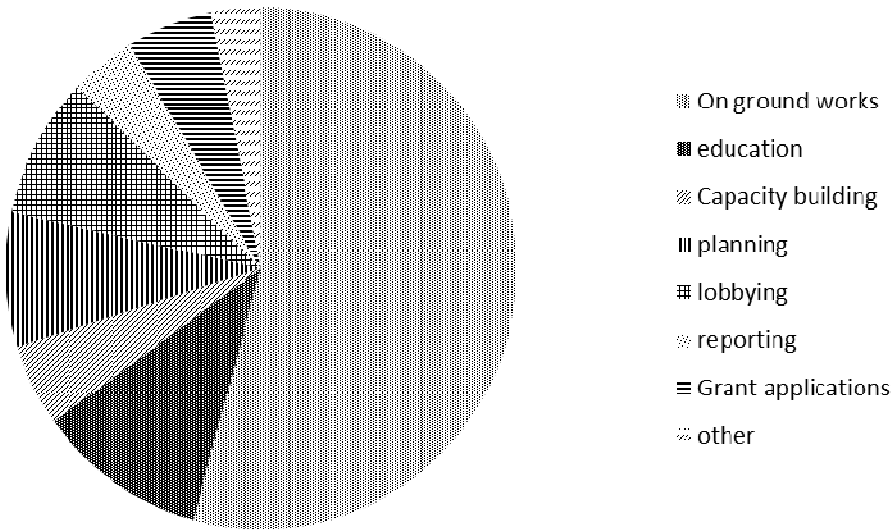


Figure 7. Area of activity of EP groups.

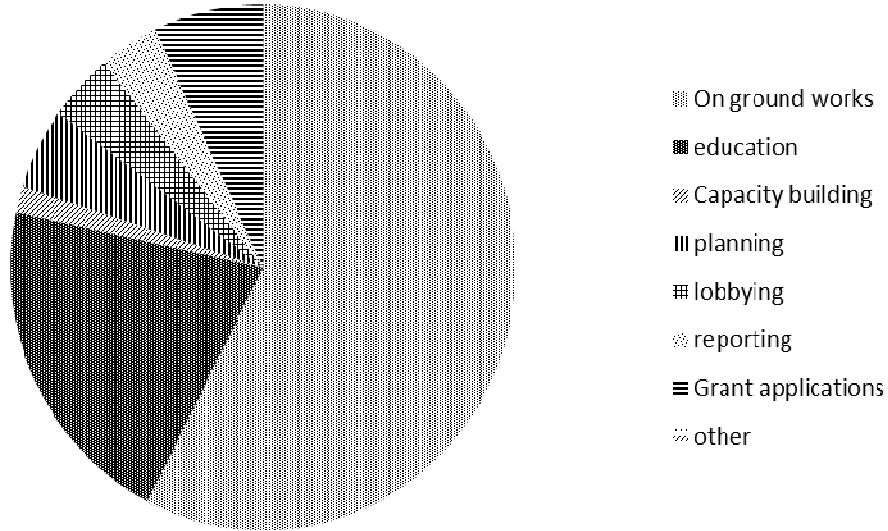


Figure 8. Area of activity of NY groups.

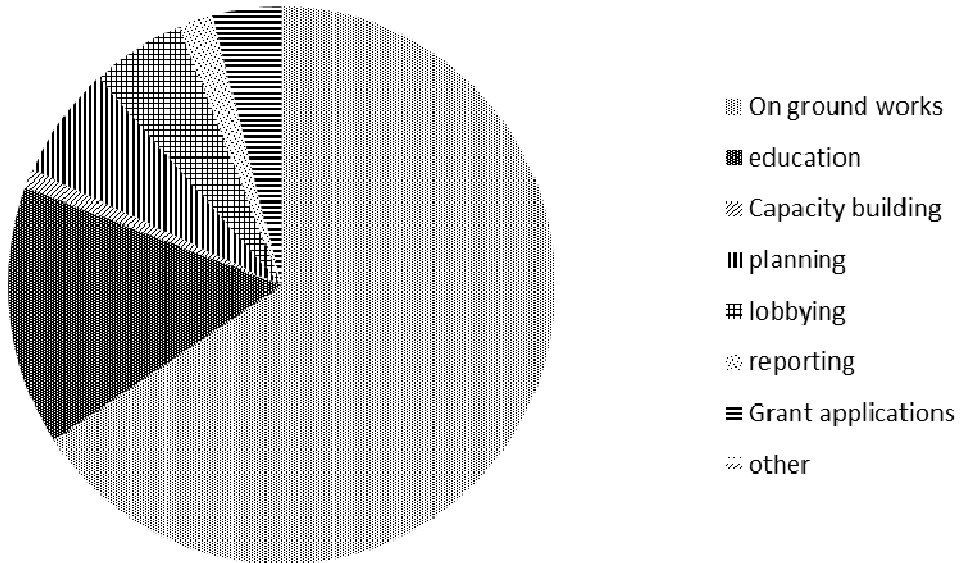


Figure 9. Area of activity of SAMDB groups.

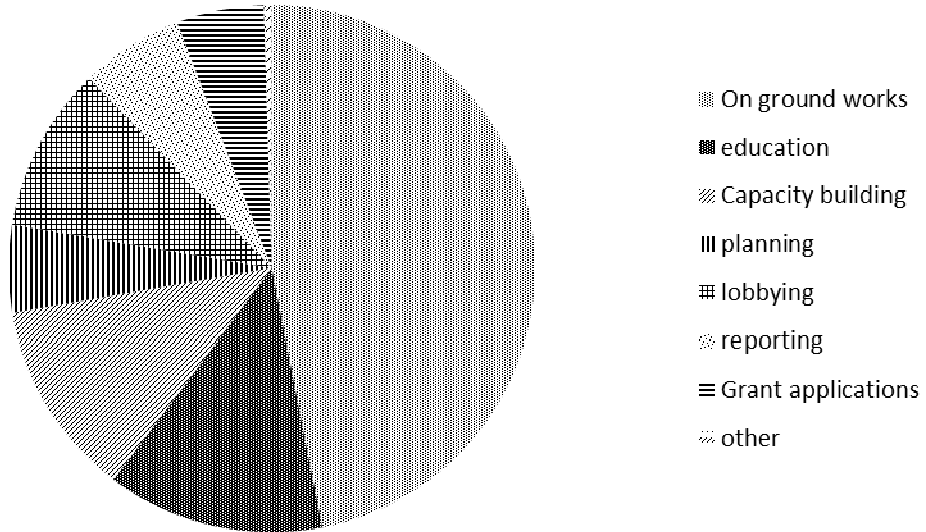


Figure 10. Area of activity of SE groups.

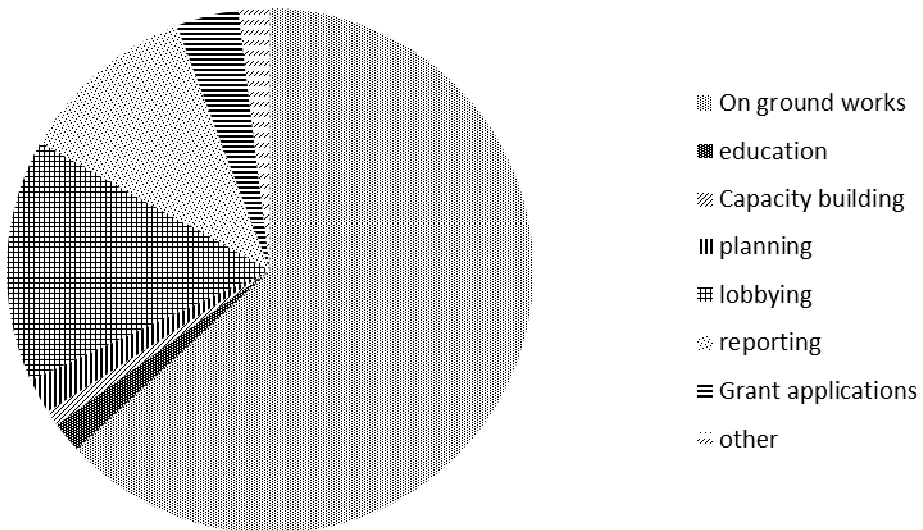


Figure 13. Amount of notice required by NGOs for information / activities.

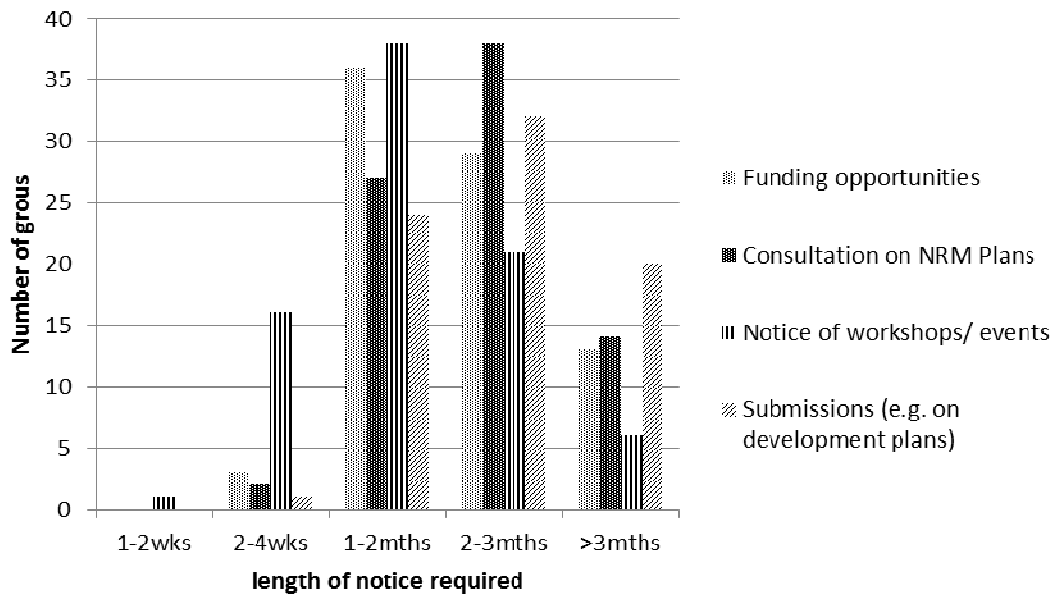


Figure 14. How information is preferred to be received for different information (nb. some multiple responses).

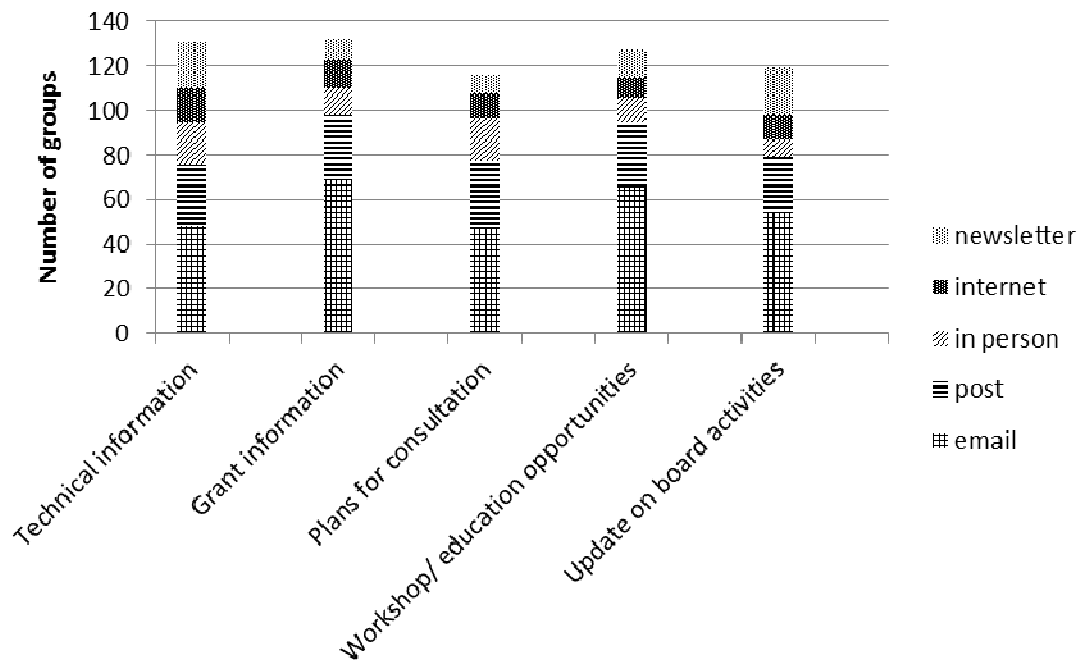


Figure 15. Awareness and involvement with various grants and awards.

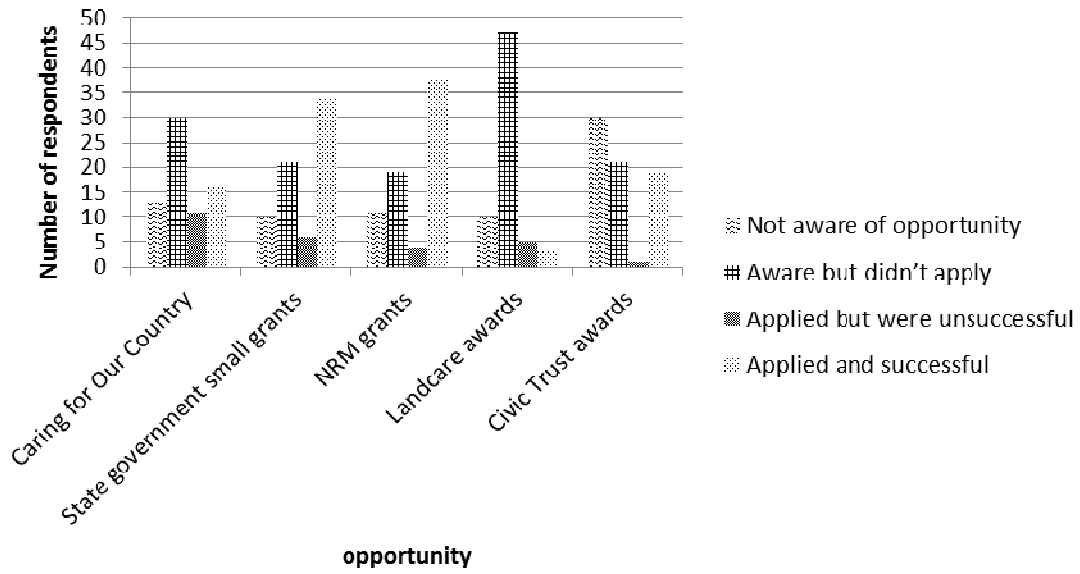


Figure 16. Percentage of groups who were aware or applied for grants that had NRM support or paid staff.

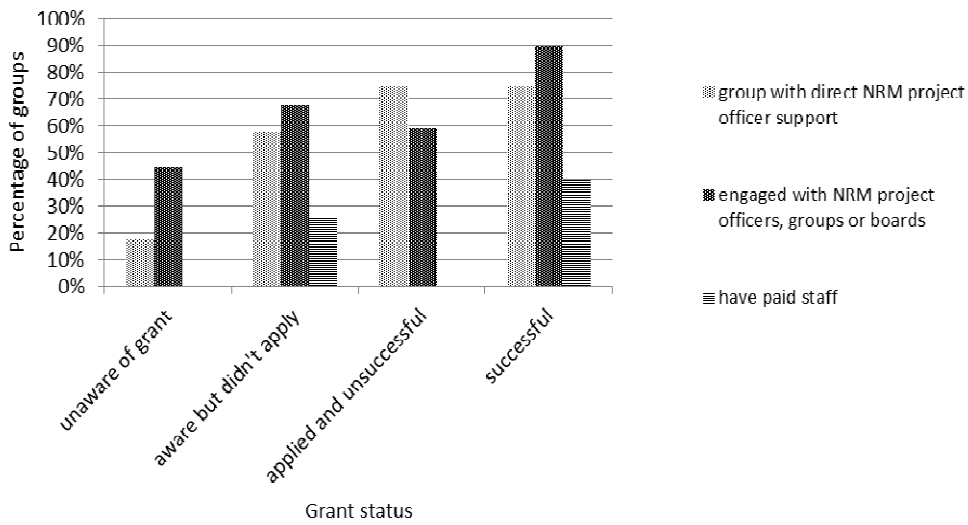


Figure 17. Overall response to Question 7a. Our group perceives no barriers to engaging in regional NRM processes.

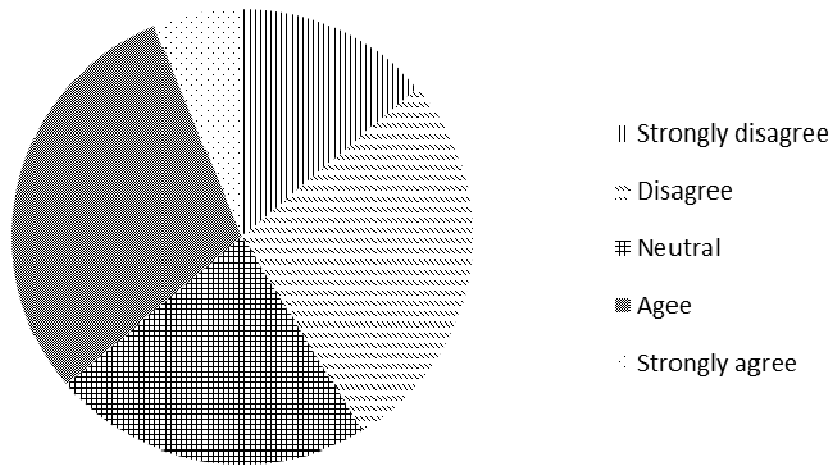


Figure 18. AMLR response to Question 7a. Our group perceives no barriers to engaging in regional NRM processes.

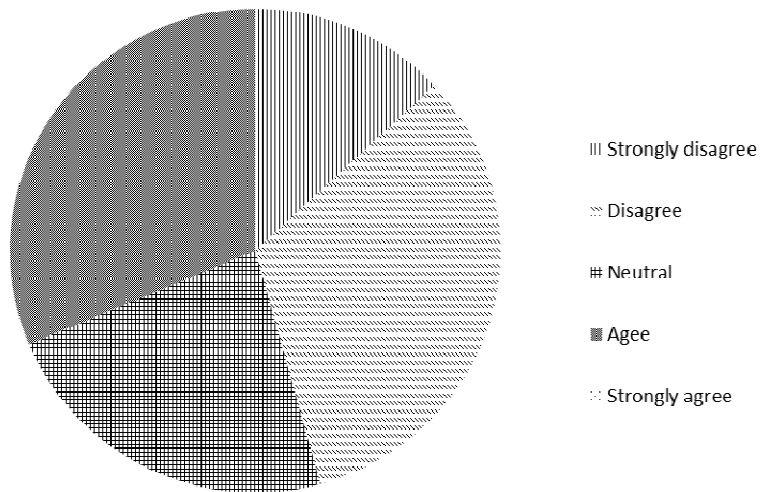


Figure 19. Statewide/cross regional response to Q7a. Our group perceives no barriers to engaging in regional NRM processes.

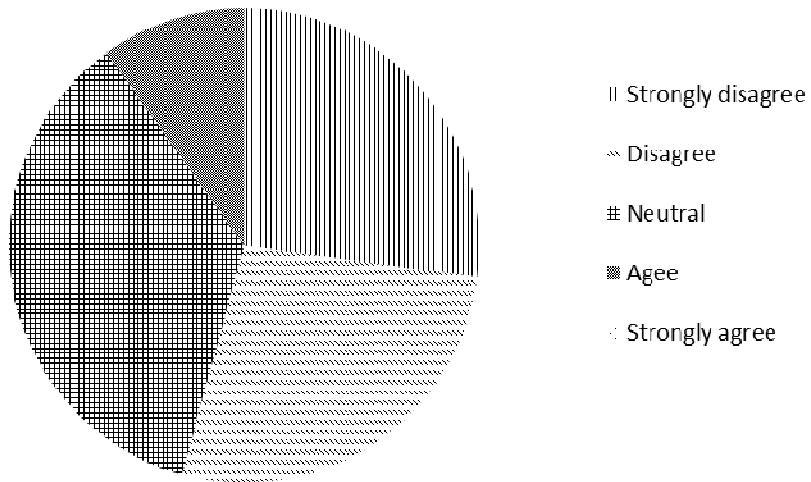


Figure 20. Response to Q7D: There is a high level of bureaucracy with NRM Boards.

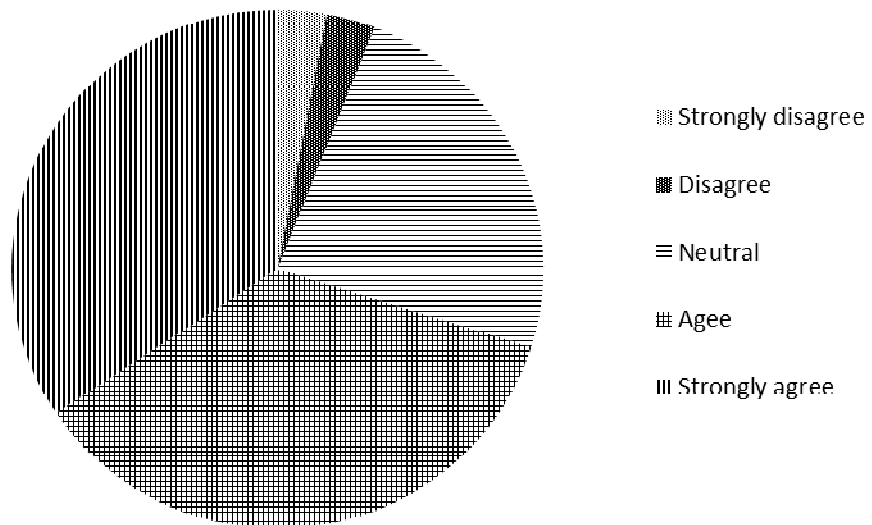


Figure 21. Response to Q7D: There is effective communication between the NRM Board and our group.

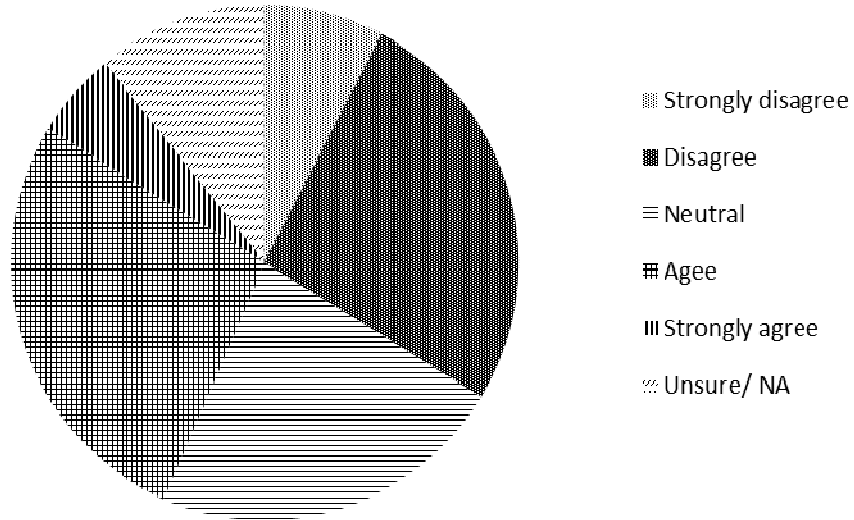


Figure 22. Response to Q7E: Our group has limited volunteer time to engage with NRM Boards.

