



29 November 2020

PESRAC Secretariat
Tasmanian Treasury and Finance
The Treasury Building
21 Murray Street
HOBART TAS 7000
Email: secretariat.PESRAC@treasury.tas.gov.au

RE: Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council – Longer-term recovery submission, November 2020

To whom it may concern:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding longer-term ideas and approaches during the recovery from COVID-19.

The Northern Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Association Inc., (trading as NRM North) is one of three formally recognised natural resource management organisations in Tasmania. NRM North is a not-for-profit organisation responsible for the planning, delivery, and implementation of integrated natural resource management in northern Tasmania.

We do this through developing strategic regional plans, and delivering services and targeted programs, that recognise the need to **balance the environmental, economic and social needs** of the community. Our team provides capacity building activities and leadership to ensure the sound management of the region's natural resources and promotes collaboration and partnerships with all stakeholders to determine appropriate investment and cost sharing strategies.

While NRM North is an incorporated association and not a government body, it performs statutory functions outlined in the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Act on behalf of the state government. The organisation receives baseline funding from the state government that provides the core executive and administrative functions. All program related funding (cash and in-kind) is leveraged through grant deeds or funding agreements with federal, state, and local government, government business enterprises, industry research and development organisations, philanthropic organisations, the private sector, or the community at-large. A

significant amount of the program investment is delivered to the community through devolved grants.

Much of the northern region's wealth is derived from industries such as agriculture, viticulture, forestry, tourism, fishing, aquaculture, and recreation, all of which depend on our natural resources. Many of these sectors are centred in regional communities. NRM North works with key stakeholders, landholders, and the community in many of these sectors to promote sustainable economic growth in our region. As noted in the Interim Report, many of these sectors have been, and still are, adversely impacted by COVID-19.

NRM North's baseline capabilities:

NRM North is a trusted partner that offers the following capabilities and services:

Managing collaborative partnerships: NRM North has a track record of developing and managing collaborative partnerships with all levels of government, the community, community groups, and individuals. We have extensive networks and relationships with members of regional communities in northern Tasmania, including on the islands of the Furneaux Group.

Leveraging investment: Our organisation successfully leverages investment from government, funding bodies, and industry to optimise outcomes. We have a demonstrated capability to bring together cash and in-kind resources to maximise investments from multiple stakeholders. Programs we deliver contribute significantly to economic activity within regional communities in the region.

Based on our current program of work, for every dollar that the state government provides in core funding, NRM North brings to the region 16 dollars in additional cash investment and a further four dollars in-kind. As an example, from 2018 to 2022, NRM North will receive \$1.4M for core services from the state government (\$350,000 per year) and will generate a further cash investment of \$27M in community-based programs delivered in the region. This will result in approximately \$57M of economic activity over the four-year horizon, much of which will occur in regional areas. This represents an excellent investment return for the state government.

Outcomes focused project design and delivery: We have a demonstrated capability of designing and delivering results at a regional scale. We have specific expertise in the delivery of projects that build community capacity, deliver change, promote resilience, and achieve on-ground results. We are often called on to support regional communities responding to natural events such as flood, fire, or drought in such a way as to become more resilient to future events. We are also focused on working with regional communities on planning for and responding to climate change. This includes working with farmers on strategies to identify and manage risks from extreme weather events or working with community, government, and

other not for profit organisations to proactively manage impacts on our natural environment such as threatened species and coastal inundation and erosion. All these actions are focused on long-term economic, social and environmental resilience.

Balanced approach: While our aims are to improve the management of natural resources in the region, we are acutely aware that those aims must address environmental, economic, and social needs. For example, many of the programs we deliver focus on productivity and profitability outcomes particularly in the agricultural sector, while also addressing the long-term sustainable management of natural resources and community wellbeing.

Good governance, adaptive management, reporting results and continuous improvement: NRM North has a strong governance framework and a culture of continuous improvement based on feedback from the community, partners, stakeholders, and Investors. We have a track record of delivering complex projects on time and within budget. We have an ability to deliver programs cost effectively and with agility.

Resilience Mindset

The PESRAC Interim Report clearly notes that the impacts of COVID-19 have forever changed our economy, community, businesses, and individuals. The rapid move to adaptive practices has demonstrated an agility in many sectors but has left some behind. As a state we need to be clear that recovery following COVID-19 will not mean returning to how things were. Instead what we need is a resilience mindset going forward.

Resilience is often confused with a capacity to bounce back to the same shape after an event. Resilience is more nuanced – it is the ability of a system to absorb a disturbance and maintain its identity, but in the process re-organise and learn from the impacts, effectively altering so it can better respond to future disruption events.

Effectively, during this recovery, we should not be aiming to put everything back the way it was, we need to learn from the experience and implement actions that maintain our identity but adapt our economy, community and environment for long-term prosperity.

Partnership Opportunities

NRM North has many of the key capabilities required to support the northern regional community in building a more resilient future. Our organisation can provide support to the state government as a delivery partner to support the longer-term recovery needs in particular in regional communities of northern Tasmania, with a focus on the following key areas identified in the PESRAC Interim Report.

Restoring Demand and Jobs

- a. **Building capacity to recover and providing the platform for growth and jobs; and**
- b. **Supporting enterprise recovery to provide private sector and not-for-profit organisations the assistance required to move forward**

As noted in the Interim Report, impediments to recovery include the damage to the ability of businesses and organisations to grow and the need for new skill development to respond to a changing world.

NRM North has the ability to support state government efforts to reach out and engage with regional communities and stakeholders (noting that more remote communities in Tasmania have typically been hit harder and are more disadvantaged – Interim Report pg. 14). We regularly put together coalitions of partners to assist in the delivery of recovery programs to address many of these skill development needs. For example, we work with the agricultural sector on improving on-farm management practices and building capacity to create sustainable and resilient businesses. We work with organisations such as Rural Business Tasmania, local governments, and industry organisations to target activities and deliver tailored support.

NRM North can utilise our strong networks, trust and confidence in these communities, and current knowledge of challenges and opportunities facing them in terms of agricultural productivity and environmental conservation. We have the ability to help the state government put resources into communities where they are needed most. We have strong expertise in managing devolved grant programs. The current programs we deliver provide funding to landowners for natural resource management outcomes but also provide economic activity that support professional advisers, contractors, rural suppliers and help to keep farm labour employed. The monies that are spent in these regional areas have a downstream flow on effect to business in regional communities (milk bars, machinery sales and repair, petrol stations, council rates and alike). Sometimes the funding we can inject into a farming enterprise makes the difference on whether an apprentice or farm labourer remains employed.

As a not for profit we also have the ability to leverage investment. Often there are federal government or philanthropic programs that will match state government investment. As noted in the capability statement above, we have an excellent track record of taking modest investments from the state government and leveraging them into much larger resource pools to fund community activities.

The risk drivers may change from time to time (flood, fire, drought, COVID, climate change) but NRM North has the agility and networks to create partnerships to help regional communities in northern Tasmania to adapt and develop resilience capabilities during recovery from the current pandemic. We would be pleased to work with the state government to identify key opportunities to assist in the recovery process.

Addressing Structural Issues

a. Regional impacts

The Interim Report, Recommendation 52, states, “ The State Government should review its capital program and place a higher weighting on distributing activity towards smaller-scale regional projects”. NRM North can work with state government and other infrastructure providers to identify priorities for regional communities. These investments could be focused at the individual property scale, community scale, or catchment / sub-catchment scale. Projects related to water management, on-farm productivity, and urban stormwater are examples of areas of opportunity. These projects build long-term community resilience and create short-term economic activity in regional areas.

How Government Delivery Needs to be Different

The Interim Report, Recommendation 63, notes ‘the state government should implement a regionally-based model for coordinating the recovery journey’; NRM North can support that transition.

NRM North has worked closely with state government to deliver programs regionally and state-wide such as the \$4M flood recovery program following the 2016 flood. Within eight weeks we developed and launched a state-wide recovery program that delivered technical services to over 300 landholders to inform funding for most impacted areas. We delivered this project on time and under budget.

In 2020 we were the successful tenderer for the delivery of the state government’s \$5M Weeds Action Fund. Again, within weeks of being notified of tender success, we initiated a program and within 3 months launched the first round of funding for landholders.

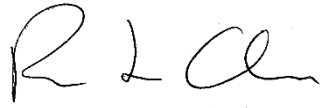
Our organisation has demonstrated significant agility to stand up the programs very quickly, work collaboratively with partners, government industry and the impacted sector, and deliver the programs on target, on time, and under budget.

In addition, we provide a cost-effective delivery model. The state government provides NRM North with core funding for executive and administrative services so the marginal costs of running additional programs make us a cost-effective service delivery partner. We have strong connections within the northern community and have many ongoing partnerships that create a strong regional network. This connection with the community allows us to seek feedback, facilitate dialogue and deliver regionally appropriate services.

NRM North is ready and able to support the state government’s economic recovery activities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment. If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me on 03 6333-7771 or via email at rcoombes@nrmnorth.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Coombes', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rosanna Coombes
CEO, NRM North