



Land and Water

NORTHERN AUSTRALIA IRRIGATION FUTURES

Providing new knowledge, tools, and processes to support debate
and decision making regarding irrigation in northern Australia



CSIRO Land and Water / CRC IF / NT, QLD, WA & Australian Governments

MONITORING AND EVALUATION PLAN

(Updated 27 January 2006)



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Publication information

Product code: ER061208 - Attachment 5

ISBN: 1 921253 20 7

The National Program for Sustainable Irrigation

The National Program for Sustainable Irrigation focuses research on the development and adoption of sustainable irrigation practices in Australian agriculture. The Program has 14 funding partners: Land & Water Australia (managing partner), Sunwater, Queensland; Horticulture Australia Limited; Goulburn-Murray Water, Victoria; Cotton Research and Development Corporation; Harvey Water, Western Australia; Lower Murray Water Authority, Victoria; Wimmera Mallee Water, Victoria; Ord Irrigation Cooperative, Western Australia; Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Water, Queensland; Department of Primary Industries and Resources South Australia; Department of Environment Water and Catchment, Western Australia; and Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia.

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NORTHERN AUSTRALIA IRRIGATION FUTURES PROJECT

MONITORING AND EVALUATION PLAN

1. SUMMARY

Deciding on whether to irrigate in northern Australia, and if so what irrigation should look like, where it should be located, and how it should be managed, requires improved understanding of river and catchment attributes and the risks associated with irrigation. Various studies are underway to improve that understanding and ensure decisions are made with the best information available about the long term implications for tropical catchments. The Northern Australia Irrigation Futures (NAIF) project is funded by the Commonwealth Government and the Governments of Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory with the aim of providing new knowledge, tools and processes to support debate and decision making regarding irrigation in northern Australia.

The NAIF project comprises of two key phases. Project initiation in 2003 was funded through Land and Water Australia's (LWA) National Program for Sustainable Irrigation (NPSI) and funding through the CRC for Irrigation Futures (CRC IF) for PhD students to undertake research consistent with the NAIF objectives. Subsequent to that, the QLD, NT, WA and Commonwealth Governments provided additional resources to the research by funding a new position of Sustainability Specialist. While the initial research under the LWA/NPSI program concludes in mid 2007, further follow-on work is anticipated as the funding agreement for the Sustainability Specialist position with the NAIF project extends to October 2008.

A Steering Committee (SC) with representation from the key funding partners and expertise in key project areas has been established to help guide the project.

The project schedule under the LWA / CSIRO funding agreement requires the development of a project "monitoring and evaluation strategy, in liaison with CRC for Irrigation Futures (CRC IF) staff and partner organisations". Following SC approval of changes to the NAIF Stage 2 Work Plan on 1 December 2005, completion of the M&E Plan is to be reported against in the NPSI Milestone 4 Report, due 31 January 2006. This document sets out the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan for the NAIF project.

The implementation of this M&E Plan will result in the production of three Project Status Reports, two NPSI Milestone Reports, one NPSI Final Report and two Financial Statements to NPSI during the remainder of the LWA/NPSI project.

The Project Team will work with the SC, the Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) and other key stakeholders to provide information about the performance of the project and to adapt the project, as required, to optimise project outcomes.

On-going and increasing demand for NAIF project outputs, ongoing and increasing requests for input from the project team into other activities, and ongoing involvement and increasing numbers of collaborators and co-funders will serve as a guide to the success of the project.

2. CONTEXT

Northern Australia holds an iconic status for many Australians. The interplay between the landscapes, rivers and strongly monsoonal weather patterns has resulted in unique and diverse ecological systems that will need special care to retain their integrity. At the same time, with some 70 per cent of Australia's available fresh water discharging from our tropical rivers, there are pressures from various quarters to extract some of the water for irrigated agriculture. There is, however, widespread recognition that mistakes were made in the past in southern Australia, and internationally, where many irrigation systems are now degraded or degrading. No one wants to see those mistakes repeated in northern Australia.

Deciding on whether to irrigate in northern Australia, and if so what irrigation should look like, where it should be located, and how it should be managed, requires improved understanding of river and catchment attributes and the risks associated with irrigation. Various studies are underway to improve that understanding and ensure decisions are made with the best information available about the long term implications for tropical catchments.

The NAIF project has been established as a collaborative arrangement between the Commonwealth, QLD, NT and WA governments to provide new knowledge, tools and processes, including an overarching sustainability framework, to support decisions on these complex issues. It is anticipated that the project will also provide new information and tools with which to consider the sustainability of new and existing irrigation in southern Australia.

3. THE NAIF PROJECT MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The considerable risks associated with the NAIF project are widely acknowledged. The project is attempting to provide a framework to address extremely complex and difficult issues of sustainability on a perhaps unprecedented scale. The project area covers the entire tropics of Australia, which encompasses many local, state and national jurisdictions, numerous complex and in many cases poorly understood hydrological systems, and an extensive range of stakeholders with sometimes competing interests and values.

Extensive changes are taking place in water resources and irrigation management across Australia. The COAG National Water Initiative, which continues and refines the significant progress Australia has made in water resource management since 1994, has focussed political attention and community expectations on shifting towards more sustainable use of our water and land resources. There is, therefore, also widespread acknowledgement of the very considerable benefits that will accrue from a successful NAIF project. Strong project management that includes flexibility to adapt to emerging issues and opportunities is critical to achieving that success.

The NAIF Project Management Framework (Figure 1) has been established to provide project governance and help ensure project success.

The Work Plan provides a detailed account of the approved activities to be carried out by the Project Team and others. The Work Plan includes a Gantt chart showing project activities, timelines and linkages to assist project management on an ongoing basis and against which progress will be assessed.

The SC has responsibility for guiding the project to help ensure appropriate outputs are created and useful outcomes are achieved. The SC is responsible for approving the NAIF Work Plan and changes to it that are required from time to time to address issues and opportunities. Changes to the Work Plan that have a significant impact on the project or its deliverables will also be reflected in the NPSI Milestone Reporting process.

The Sustainability Specialist is responsible for maintaining the NAIF Project Management Framework, in consultation with the Project Team, and for reporting progress to the SC. This M&E Plan establishes the mechanisms for monitoring and reporting that progress.

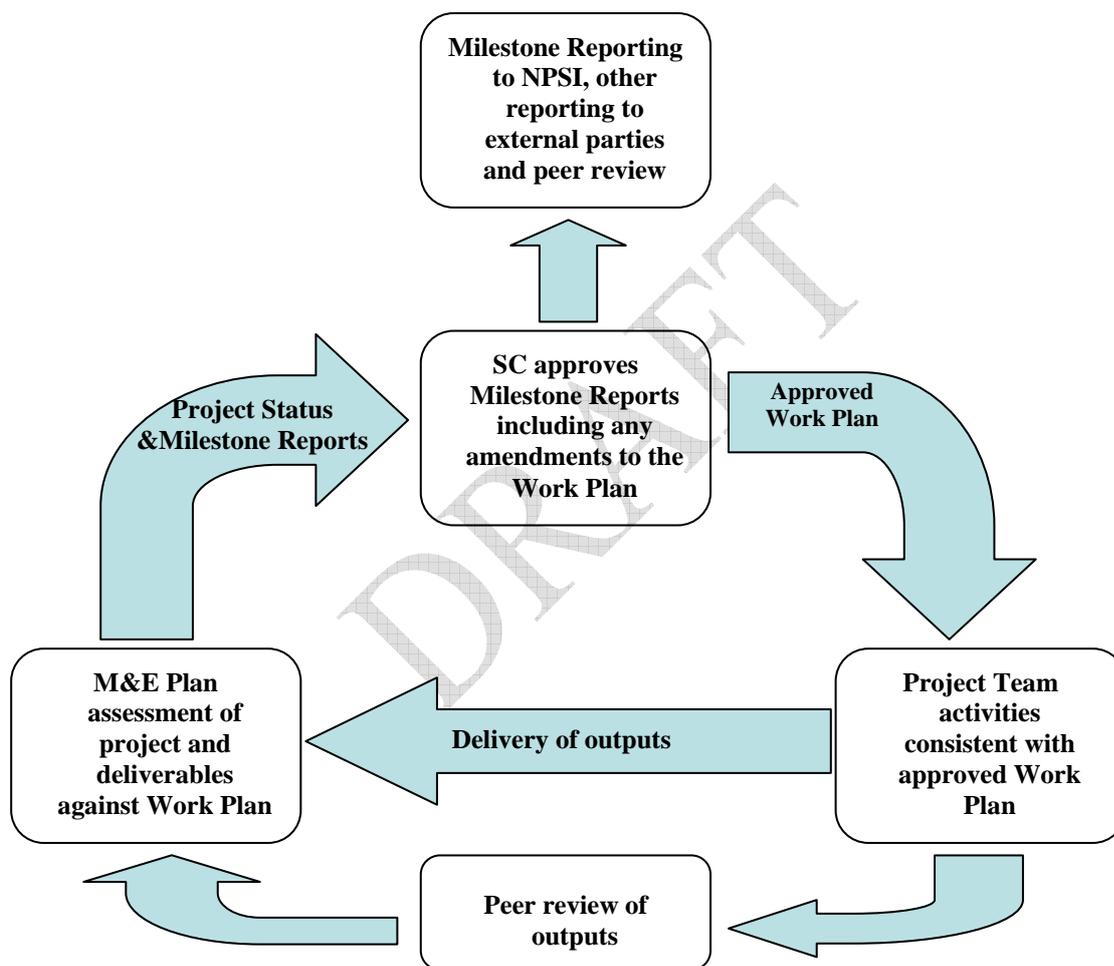


Figure 1. The NAIF Project Management Framework

4. PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

The NAIF project schedule under the LWA/CSIRO funding agreement requires the development of a project monitoring and evaluation strategy, in liaison with CRC for Irrigation Futures staff and partner organisations, and subject to approval by the SC.

Following approval by the SC on 1 December 2005 of changes to the NAIF Stage 2 Work Plan, completion of the M&E Plan is to be reported against in the NPSI Milestone 4 report, due 31 January 2006. This document sets out the M&E Plan for the NAIF project.

5. DEFINITION OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION

“Monitoring is a continuing function that aims primarily to provide managers and the main stakeholders with regular feedback and early indications of progress or lack thereof in the achievement of intended results. Monitoring tracks the actual performance or situation against what was planned or expected according to pre-determined standards. Monitoring generally involves collecting and analysing data on implementation processes, strategies and results, and recommending corrective measures.

Evaluation is a time bound exercise that attempts to assess systematically and objectively the relevance, performance and success of ongoing and completed project activities. Evaluation can also address outcomes or other development issues. Evaluation is undertaken selectively to answer specific questions to guide decision-makers and/or project managers, and to provide information on whether underlying theories and assumptions used in project development were valid, what worked and what did not work and why. Evaluation commonly aims to determine relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. Evaluation is a vehicle for extracting lessons from operating experiences and determining the need for modifications to the strategic results framework. Evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process.”²

6. PROJECT GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

Project Goal ³

The NAIF project goal is “To provide a sustainability framework that community and policy makers can use to ensure sustainable irrigation in northern Australia”.

The project will contribute to a sustainable irrigation industry in northern Australia that delivers economic and social benefits while minimising environmental impacts.

² UNDP Handbook on Monitoring and Evaluation for Results.

³ From NAIF Land & Water Sustainable Irrigation Project Application Form, 2003.

Project Objectives ⁴

The NAIF project objectives are to:

1. Delineate key landscape attributes (including soil & water resources, climate, vegetation, rivers, near shore marine environments, & where appropriate links to people, industries, markets) relevant to sustainable irrigation development across northern Australia
2. Use key landscape attributes to develop sustainability indicators and associated management criteria covering a range of scales (field, farm, district, irrigation scheme, catchment) for northern Australia
3. Develop an overall framework that, through their involvement, is embraced by policy makers, regulators, investors and managers, to help ensure irrigation developments in northern Australia are managed in a consistent and sustainable manner
4. Use a number of linked case studies to inform and support development and enable testing of the framework
5. Through provision of a robust framework, contribute tools and knowledge to support considered debate & long term strategic planning for northern Australia & Australia as a whole

7. PURPOSE OF THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION PLAN

This M&E Plan is designed to:

- Assist the Project Team, SC and the funding organisations to decide if the project and its priorities, targets and actions need to be changed, and where attention should be focussed
- Support the use of an adaptive management approach to ensure continuous improvement based on new knowledge and experience as the project progresses
- Support the assessment of project outputs, outcomes and overall success
- Determine accountability for monitoring, evaluating and reporting outcomes and
- Establish regular reporting systems for accountability to SC and the State and Commonwealth Government project investors.

This M&E Plan provides the project goals and objectives, describes the performance indicators against which success can be measured, lists the sources of data to enable measurement, identifies the risks to success, indicates the reporting regime and allocates responsibilities for implementation of the Plan.

The development of this M&E Plan has been guided by SC considerations, analysis of project communications risk, the NAIF Stage 2 Work Plan and the NPSI Milestone Reporting Framework. The Plan meets the NPSI Milestone requirement and will assist in assessment and management of the NAIF project, including the NPSI component.

⁴ Objective 3 is slightly different to the original project objectives. The reason for this change is detailed in the NPSI Milestone 4 Report.

8. MONITORING AND EVALUATION DESIGN

Guiding Principles

It has always been recognised that the NAIF research project is a challenging one that will require a high degree of adaptability to achieve success. The project funders, SC and Project Team have all demonstrated an understanding and willingness to adapt the project design in response to new knowledge and feedback. This M&E Plan is based on a continuation of the principles of adaptive and participatory management.

Considerations in Design

Monitoring and evaluation, reporting and decision-making are all critical to adaptability. The following roles and relationships are important to achieving project success:

The Steering Committee was established on 11 March 2004 to provide strategic advice and guidance to the project. It is the primary mechanism for engagement and communication with the project funding and partner organisations. Membership of the SC is designed to provide both expertise in key project areas and representation of the key funding partner organisations. The SC meets on a regular basis to review progress and provide advice on project direction.

The NPSI Program Coordinator (Murray Chapman) is responsible for overseeing delivery of the project on behalf of LWA and for advising LWA in relation to performance against the project brief. This is principally achieved through the NPSI Milestone Reporting process.

CSIRO, through the Land and Water Division, is the organisation contracted to manage and deliver the NAIF project.

The Project Team, led by the Principal Investigator (Dr Keith Bristow), is responsible for day to day project activities and for reporting on project progress. This is achieved in partnership with Commonwealth, QLD, NT and WA Government agency staff, and other collaborating organisations.

The Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) is a primary mechanism for linking with key stakeholders. The SRG provides independent advice to assist and guide the project, particularly in relation to potential impacts on stakeholders.

The Stakeholder Network is a forum for dissemination of information to individuals and organisations who wish to be kept informed about the NAIF project and an important mechanism for both input and feedback on the project.

Methods

Information gained from multiple different sources will be used to provide a holistic evaluation of the project. In some cases, a Performance Indicator requires only a simple numeric response. In other cases, multiple methods of gathering information are required to provide a reasonable assessment against a criterion.

To keep M&E costs in perspective, attempts have been made to identify data sources that are already available to the Project Team or which can be incorporated into existing project activities. The primary sources of data are:

- The NAIF database, managed by CSIRO Land and Water which holds all project data
- Minutes of all Steering Committee meetings, which are held on the project database
- The NAIF Website, which is frequently updated with information on project activities and events, reports, publications, media releases and linkages with other projects and programs
- Formal and informal feedback, which will be sought from a range of sources, including the SC, SRG, SN, internal and external reviews in relation to specific and general aspects of the project.

In accordance with the principles of participatory monitoring and evaluation the SC and the Project Team will be important sources of advice for monitoring and evaluation.

9. THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL REVIEW

The main ongoing mechanisms for reviewing the NAIF project will be the SC, the SRG, normal CSIRO pre-publication procedures and external science review processes for journal publications etc.

An independent Expert Panel will be established to provide an external review of the project and its outputs at several key points, including:

- Review of the key report *“Recommended approach for finalising and delivering the Sustainability Framework”*
- Review of the key report *“Towards a Sustainability Framework for supporting community decision making regarding irrigation in northern Australia: lessons from three case studies”*
- Review of the Research prior to preparation of the project final report
- Review of the NAIF Final Report and Sustainability Framework.

In addition, a workshop including the project team and key stakeholders will be held in WA, NT and QLD to discuss the research prior to preparation of the final report.

10. ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT OUTCOMES

The NAIF Project Application Form listed the anticipated outcomes as:

- By 2007 leading stakeholders (Governments, communities, investors, land and water managers) will be more informed and able to use the sustainability framework including key biophysical datasets and sustainability indicators when debating and making decisions regarding irrigation in northern Australia
- By 2007 testing of existing northern irrigation management systems and practices against the sustainability framework and indicators will have commenced
- By 2010 relevant State and Commonwealth policies will have adopted the framework and

sustainability indicators

- By 2015 a sustainable irrigation industry in northern Australia will be functioning that delivers a wide range of economic and social benefits whilst minimising environmental impacts.

The application proposed that the project outputs would

“strongly influence a range of policy, regulation, management and institutional requirements across northern Australia, especially in meeting COAG and NWI water reform requirements and minimising the environmental footprint associated with irrigation developments. The project will provide regulatory organisations within each State and Territory appropriate and consistent guidelines for the environmental assessment of proposed irrigation developments in northern Australia.”

It is anticipated that the first two outcomes will be assessable within the duration of the current NAIF project and to some extent these have been incorporated into the assessment against project outputs in Section 10. However, the most aspirational of the stated outcomes, that by 2010 the framework will be adopted and that by 2015 irrigation in northern Australia will be sustainable, by definition fall outside of the project timeframe.

It will not be possible to fully answer the question of what wider impacts the NAIF project has during the course of the project. However, it will be possible to gain an understanding of trends by capturing stakeholder perspectives on the NAIF project, its activities and outputs, degree of influence and likelihood of contributing significantly to the outcomes which are sought.

Project Status Reports will, therefore, include narrative examples that indicate progress towards the project outcomes.

11. ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT OUTPUTS

The following achievement criteria, performance indicators, data sources and risk apply to the assessment against project outputs:

Achievement Criteria	Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Risks
<p>A comprehensive, practical and usable framework for supporting debate and decisions about irrigation in northern Australia</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress towards SF • Framework developed and ‘tested’ through effective case studies • External review of SF & associated research • SF is documented, approved for release and available to stakeholders • Adoption of the framework by policy and regulatory agencies and investors and managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SC feedback on progress, as reported in Status Reports, recorded in SC minutes. External review of report <i>Recommended approach for finalising and delivering the Sustainability Framework</i> • Report <i>Towards a Sustainability Framework for supporting community decision making regarding irrigation in northern Australia: Lessons from three case studies</i> published on NAIF website • Documented feedback on research and draft SF from independent review, SRG, case study stakeholders, SN and the workshop on SF in each State • Approval recorded in SC minutes. SF available via NAIF website • Feedback from SC, SRG, SN, workshop on SF in each state and other stakeholders on likelihood of adoption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to establish case studies which contribute significantly to the SF • Adoption hard to measure within project timeframe. Project Team/SC unable to influence agency & other

Achievement Criteria	Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Risks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acceptance of framework by key stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documented feedback from SC, SRG, SN, workshop on SF in each state, correspondence and media items in response to release of SF 	<p>decision makers to use SF</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of ownership of the framework by decision-makers and/or other stakeholders
<p>Understanding of key biophysical features relevant to irrigation in northern Australia</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive collation and interpretation of key knowledge and understandings of northern Australian landscapes Publication of reports approved by SC in accordance with work plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documented feedback from SC, SRG and independent review Approval recorded in SC minutes & list of available publications on NAIF website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insufficient research of north Australian landscapes and their function completed to allow reasonable interpretation. Insufficient in-kind or other support from State and Cth agencies to support analysis and interpretation
<p>Description of the nature and spatial distribution of key landscape attributes of importance in siting and managing sustainable irrigation schemes in northern Australia</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Range of communications and publications addressing key knowledge and understandings of northern Australian landscapes and their implications to sustainable irrigation available to broad audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of available publications on NAIF website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project team is unsuccessful in securing appropriate communications support and meeting required timeframes. Insufficient in-kind and other support from State and Cth agencies to support analysis and interpretation

Achievement Criteria	Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Risks
Successful project communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and Stakeholder Engagement (C&SE) Plan developed and operational • Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) established and operating as per TOR • Stakeholder Network established and receiving quarterly project updates. • Effective linkages with other key projects and programs established • Publication of reports according to work plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval of C&SE Plan recorded in SC minutes and reported in NPSI Milestone Report. • Project records on number of contacts with SRG members. Feedback from SRG members • Project records on number of members of Stakeholder Network and contacts with Stakeholder Network • Project records of requests for NAIF involvement in other projects and programs. Project records of cross participation and coordination. • List of available publications on NAIF website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key stakeholders unwilling to join SRG • The small resource base significantly limits linkages with other key projects and programs
Effective implementation and coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SC established and operating as per TOR. Number of meetings held • Expenditure consistent with budget projections • Project partners maintain investment for project duration • Project staff and PhD students appointed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minutes of SC meetings • Project Financial Statements approved by LWA • CSIRO/DAFF Deed of Grant and CSIRO/WA/NT/QLD Govt Funding Agreements approved • Advice from PI. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to SC membership reduce 'ownership' • Not all budgeted financial resources available or they are insufficient • One or more partners withdraw funding early • Inability to attract suitably qualified PhD students to the

Achievement Criteria	Performance Indicators	Data Sources	Risks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research undertaken as per agreed Work Plan • Project is completed by agreed date. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval of Status Reports recorded in SC minutes • Final Report provided to LWA by agreed date. Final Project Financial Statement approved by LWA 	<p>project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key research staff are not retained • Maintaining completion date creates stakeholder unrest due to insufficient time to develop trust and productive working partnerships
Monitoring and Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M&E Plan developed, approved and implemented • Information is appropriate for day to day management of the M&E Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval of M&E Plan and status recorded in SC minutes & NPSI Milestone report • Advice on implementation of M&E Plan recorded in SC minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duplication of reporting for multiple purposes (NPSI, CRC IF, Cth/States/NT funding agreements) increases project overheads and administration costs

12. RISKS

With multiple funding sources, multiple reporting requirements and numerous internal and external stakeholders, there are a range of important project risks which have been identified above. Using this M&E Plan the SC will have an ongoing mechanism for monitoring those risks and the actions being taken to minimise their potential impacts. Strategies to address the risks will be prepared by the Project Team for consideration by SC and NPSI as required.

13. REPORTING MECHANISMS

Three different reports will be delivered under this M&E Plan.

NPSI Milestone Reports

Milestone Reports are the primary tool used by the LWA/NPSI program to assess delivery against the NPSI Project Schedule. These Reports provide the Project Team's advice to NPSI on performance against the Key Deliverables and associated Achievement Criteria for the project for the reporting period. The timetable for these reports is established in the Project Schedule. The format follows the NPSI '*Guidelines for Milestone Reporting*' and '*Guidelines for preparing and submitting final reports to Land and Water Australia*'.

Project Status Reports

Project Status Reports are provided to the SC with the Draft Milestone Reports to assist its role in guiding the project. The Project Status Reports provide an assessment of project status and contain the following sections:

1. Assessment of the project against the Achievement Criteria and Performance Indicators provided in Section 10 of this Plan. Typically not all criteria and indicators are addressed in each report
2. A statement on project status summarising performance against the Work Plan, key outputs, achievements and learnings, issues and opportunities and their implications for the project
3. Narratives indicating progress against the project outcomes
4. Recommendations to the SC to address the issues and opportunities identified in 2.

Financial Statements

Financial Statements are required at times specified in the LWA/CSIRO project agreement. The format for these reports is consistent with NPSI requirements for financial statements (Form FI-F-08).

14. REPORTING TIMETABLE

The following reports will be produced under this M&E plan during the remainder of the LWA/NPSI project:

	Due	Report Type	Comments
1	31/01/06	M&E Plan (draft) to SC	SC endorsement expected on 14/02/06
2	31/01/06	Milestone 4 Report to NPSI	For LWA approval. SC endorsement expected on 14/02/06
3	01/04/06	Project Status Report and Draft Milestone 5 Report to SC	For consideration of Project Status Report & endorsement of draft Milestone Report
4	01/05/06	Milestone 5 Report to NPSI	For LWA approval
5	30/09/06	Financial Statement 2005/06 to NPSI	For LWA approval
6	31/10/06	Project Status Report and Draft Milestone 6 Report to SC	For consideration of Project Status Report & endorsement of draft Milestone Report
7	30/11/06	Milestone 6 Report to NPSI	For LWA approval
8	30/06/07	Project Status Report and Draft Milestone 7 – Final Report to SC	For consideration of Project Status Report & endorsement of draft Milestone Report
9	31/07/07	Milestone 7 – Final Report to NPSI	For LWA approval
10	30/09/07	Final Financial Statement 2006/07 to NPSI	For LWA approval

15. IMPLEMENTATION OF CHANGES RESULTING FROM THE M&E PLAN

Changes to the project approved by the SC will be reflected in updates to the Work Plan. The amended Work Plan will be provided to the NPSI Program Coordinator with the next Milestone Report.

16. RESPONSIBILITIES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE M&E PLAN

The Sustainability Specialist (Jeff Camkin) has responsibility for preparation of the M&E Plan, for its ongoing operation and for preparation and delivery of the Milestone Reports and Project Status Reports.

The Principal Investigator (Dr Keith Bristow) has responsibility for approval of the NPSI Financial Statements, Milestone Reports and Project Status Reports, and has overall responsibility for the NAIF project.

CSIRO Land and Water Project Management Accountants are responsible for the preparation of the NPSI Financial Statements.

All Project Team members have responsibility for the maintenance and provision of data and information relevant to implementation of the M&E Plan.

17. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REPORTING EFFORT

The estimated Project Team effort required for development and implementation of the M&E Plan to 30 September 2007, in terms of work days, are:

Deliverables	Total Person Days
1 x Draft M&E Plan	5
2 x Milestone Reports to NPSI	8
1 x Final Milestone Report to NPSI	20
3 x Project Status Reports to SC	9
2 x Financial Statements to NPSI	2
M&E data management	10
TOTAL DAYS	54

18. CONFIDENTIALITY

This M&E Plan and Project Status Reports will be publicly available on the NAIF website. NPSI Milestone Reports, or summaries of them, are made available on the NPSI website.

This M&E Plan and the associated reports are subject to the Copyright and Disclaimer information on page 2.