



Burnett Mary Region Environmental Account

2021–2022
Summary and Information Statement

Measuring the condition of our environmental assets to
inform future investment strategies and pathways

The Burnett Mary Regional Group acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land and pays respect to the elders past, present and future, representing the traditional Aboriginal land throughout the Burnett Mary region.

Executive Summary

Overview

Covering approximately 56,000 km² of land and 11,000 km² of sea, the Burnett Mary region is internationally renowned for its ecological diversity, extensive primary production, and rich cultural heritage. The region supports Queensland's largest regional population (approximately 300,000 people) – outside of southeast Queensland. The Burnett Mary Regional Group for Natural Resource Management Ltd. (BMRG) is the peak body for natural resource management (NRM) within the Burnett Mary region. Established in 2001, it is one of 54 national, not-for-profit regional bodies providing an essential link between the community and various programs procured by Government and other funding sources.

BMRG's vision is "to protect and enhance the agricultural and natural environment of the Burnett Mary region for future generations". This is achieved by directing investment into a wide range of community-based programs that deliver positive outcomes in the areas of ecological diversity, sustainable land management, water quality, cultural heritage values and coastal and marine management. Community collaboration and partnerships are paramount to achieving BMRG's vision which is supported by maintaining strong relationships with a range of organisations including: Federal, State and Local Governments; Landcare and Catchment Care groups; Indigenous organisations; agricultural and industrial sectors; universities and schools.

After our community, the natural capital of the Burnett Mary region is arguably our most valuable asset. The region provides habitat for more than half of Australia's bird species and more than 7,500 flora and fauna species, many of which are rare, threatened, or endangered. Representing the southern boundary of the Great Barrier Reef, the region's marine environment has more marine fish diversity than the reef itself. The region includes:

- World Heritage listed K'gari [Fraser Island] – K'gari is the largest sand island in the world and was added to the World Heritage list in 1992 in recognition of its outstanding natural and cultural values.
- Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance listed Great Sandy Strait – Covering 93,160 ha, this internationally renowned wetland is a haven for migratory birds and iconic species such as the dugong

Natural capital also underpins a thriving agricultural sector. The Burnett Mary region is well-known for its prime agricultural land, well-managed water resources and innovative farming and fishing practices. These attributes support a range of industries including grazing, pork, sugar, dairy, horticulture, tree crops, seafood, grain and wine and associated processing and value-adding industries.

Burnett Mary Regional Environmental Account

Over the past 12 months, the Burnett Mary Regional Group has worked alongside Accounting for Nature (AfN) to develop a world-first comprehensive regional environmental account that includes native vegetation, fauna, and freshwater ecosystems. This pioneering work was made possible by a generous grant from the Minderoo Foundation, and by the support of Traditional Owners and numerous partner organisations.

Data on environmental condition was collected by Burnett Mary Regional Group staff with supervision and support from AfN Accredited Experts. Data collection and analysis procedures complied with protocols outlined in four AfN Methods, which were developed and accredited through the course of this project. A diverse environmental monitoring toolkit was employed, including traditional field sampling techniques, complemented by the use of emerging technologies such as eDNA sampling, which identifies species present in waterbody localities.

The first year of data collection has revealed a wealth of natural capital in our region and is a testament to the community's management and investment in the ecosystems that underpin both our native species and economy. The significant outcomes of this base year account are:

- An Econd® of 41.7 was recorded for native vegetation, indicating that large areas of the landscape are intact and in what BMRG considers to be good condition, despite a history of land clearance. Protected areas, including World Heritage Areas achieved an Econd® of 85 showing that areas managed for nature are being maintained in excellent condition.

Executive Summary

- An Econd® of 94.4 was recorded for terrestrial fauna, which indicates that the vertebrate fauna of the region is largely intact. Although species such as the Gastric Brooding Frog (*Rheobatrachus silus*) have become extinct in the region, and approximately 85 species are listed as threatened; in contrast, 600 species are rated as Least Concern and faring well in the landscape. These results are comparable to other regions and taxonomic groups where the Red List Index has been applied. Despite the relatively high scores for this asset, these results also highlight that the region has a high number of threatened species, which will continue to be the focus of BMRG's work.
- An Econd® of 53.6 was recorded for aquatic fauna, reflecting the impact of unprecedented flooding on aquatic ecosystems and species, with data and results also affected by challenging survey conditions.
- An Econd® of 62.1 was recorded for waterway condition, which reflects the significant investment in water quality improvement programs in the region over many years. Of the five catchments assessed in this account, the Mary River was in the best condition, with an Econd® of 75.6. The highly regulated Burnett River was in the worst condition with a
- Alongside this AfN Accredited Environmental Account, BMRG has collaborated with regional Traditional Owner groups to trial AfN's Cultural Condition Framework for assessing culturally significant environmental assets. The cultural assessment comprises three case studies of significant locations.
- To complement the AfN Accredited Environmental Account, Soil and forest carbon stocks were also assessed using the FLINTpro carbon analysis platform developed by Mullion Group. The regional carbon assessment has highlighted sequestration opportunities in the landscape with identified links to natural capital assets.
- The environmental account will also be used to model and assess the resilience and potential risks posed to environmental assets by bushfires and floods.

This Environmental Account and Information Statement presents a snapshot of environmental condition. However, BMRG will continue to collect repeated measures at regular intervals to monitor and better understand the ongoing improvements in the condition of environmental assets in response to a significant program of investment in building natural capital in the region. BMRG intends to include coastal and marine assets, such as inshore reefs, seagrass meadows and marine turtles, in future environmental accounts.

This Environmental Account and Information Statement establishes the region's environmental accounting program, which will include annual adjustments to the existing account to reflect emerging knowledge. We will undertake periodic reassessment of environmental assets, further develop cultural and carbon methods, and add new natural assets to the regional account. We will also support property-level environmental accounts developed under BMRG's collaborative arrangements.

Benefits To The Region And Beyond

The Burnett Mary Region Environmental Account provides detailed information that builds upon our understanding of the region and leverages existing environmental investments.

The Burnett Mary Regional Environmental Account:

- Provides baseline data on the condition of environmental assets.
- Informs natural resource management investment and funding strategies.
- Facilitates access to emerging environmental markets.
- Communicates the outcomes and benefits of environmental programs to the community and stakeholders.
- Inspires and enables partner organisations with case studies, information, and tools to produce environmental accounts for their areas of interest.
- Contributes to State, National, and International frameworks and targets such as the Sustainable Development Goals and Aichi Targets.

The Burnett Mary Region Environmental Account will also provide a model that enables adoption of environmental accounting by Natural Resource Management organisations Australia-wide.



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