

# Chapter 3

## Institutional Arrangements

Exotic pest management is a shared responsibility of government, industry and community and each plays a part and bears the costs of response to the threat to consequences of it.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

3.1 While Chapter 1 examined the economic, environmental and social costs that invasive species pose to Australia, in this chapter the Committee examines the complex governmental arrangements which are currently in place for the management of invasive species. The Australian Constitution confers certain specific powers on the Commonwealth Government. All other powers not so conferred reside with the individual State/Territory Governments. The Committee acknowledges that while the on-the-ground management of invasive species is largely the responsibility of the State and Territory governments, the Commonwealth government plays a significant coordination and leadership role. As discussed later in this report the complex cross-jurisdictional structure does not always result in the most effective management and control of invasive species.

### Ministerial Council

3.2 Ministerial Councils facilitate the national implementation of plans and proposals that would not otherwise be possible because of the limitations imposed by the division of constitutional powers between the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments.

3.3 The division of Constitutional powers, coupled with a desire on the part of the Commonwealth/State/Territory governments to discuss agricultural matters generally, was the catalyst for the creation, in 1934, of the Australian Agricultural Council. For similar reasons Ministerial Councils dealing with a wide range of issues, including natural resource matters, have been established over the years.

3.4 During 1999-2000 debate on the impact of natural resource degradation in Australia began in earnest, resulting in the establishment of the Natural Resources Management Ministerial Council (NRMMC). All natural resource management issues previously dealt with by existing Councils, such as the Australia New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council (ANZECC), the Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand (ARMCANZ) and the Ministerial Council on Forestry, Fisheries and Aquaculture (MCFFA), were transferred to the NRMMC.

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<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Rural Sciences, *Submission 62a*, p. 13.

3.5 The residual industry-related issues of these latter two Councils were brought together under the Primary Industries Ministerial Council (PIMC).

### **Natural Resources Management Ministerial Council (NRMMC)<sup>2</sup>**

3.6 The NRMMC consists of the Commonwealth/State/Territory and New Zealand government ministers responsible for primary industries, natural resources, environment and water policy. The Australian Local Government Association and Papua New Guinea are formal observers. The NRMMC is jointly chaired by the Commonwealth Government Ministers responsible for Environment and Heritage, and Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Meetings of the NRMMC are held in camera; biannually and decisions of the NRMMC are arrived at by consensus.

3.7 The NRMMC is the peak government forum for consultation, coordination and, where appropriate, integration of action by governments on natural resource management issues. The objective of the NRMMC is:

to promote the conservation and sustainable use of Australia's natural resources.<sup>3</sup>

3.8 This is reflected in the terms of reference for the NRMMC which outline, amongst other things, its role in developing policies and strategies for national approaches to the conservation, sustainable use and management of Australia's land, water, vegetation and biological resources. The terms of reference include the NRMMC's role in the development and implementation of national natural resource management programs including the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP) and the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT).

3.9 The Committee heard that the NRMMC recognises the threat posed by invasive species. Dr Dickson, Assistant Secretary, Natural Resource Management Policy Branch, Department of Environment and Heritage told the Committee that:

In April this year the Australian government significantly raised the profile and the importance of this issue [invasive species] for the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council and gained agreement from their state and territory ministers to look at options for developing a robust national framework to prevent significant new invasive species establishing in Australia and reducing the impacts of the major pests and weeds already present.<sup>4</sup>

3.10 Dr Dickson went on to say:

They also were very cognisant of the significant and growing threat posed by invasive species and, in particular, the impact and the contribution to

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2 Ministerial Council website at: [www.mincos.gov.au/about\\_mrnmc.htm](http://www.mincos.gov.au/about_mrnmc.htm).

3 *ibid.*

4 Dr Rhondda Dickson, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2004, p. 56.

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biodiversity loss in Australia. The standing committee to that council are investigating the options. They have just started that process now. They will be working with the primary industry standing committee and preparing a report for council on what options there may be for early consideration in 2005.<sup>5</sup>

3.11 The intention of the NRMCC in initiating the development of options to improve the robustness of the national framework is to have the coordination and frameworks in place that can enable effective regional approaches to work.<sup>6</sup> The Committee commends the NRMCC and for its acknowledgement of this issue and for initiating action. It expresses its hope that the investigation will be timely and provide recommendations for action that help Australia preserve its diverse native flora and fauna from further threat by invasive species. It hopes that the creation of a coordinated framework will allow for more timely and targeted application of monies to address invasive species.

3.12 Having heard evidence about the devastating impact of cane toads on the northern quolls in Kakadu and its potential to cause biodiversity loss in areas that it is spreading into, the Committee welcomes the directive from the NRMCC to the Vertebrate Pest Committee to investigate options for a national approach to cane toads. The Committee, however, notes the lack of timeliness in this directive. The impact of cane toads is well known and the Committee notes that there is an element of 'too little too late' in issuing this directive at such a late stage.

### ***Natural Resource Management Standing Committee***

3.13 The NRMCC is supported the Natural Resource Management Standing Committee (NRMSC). The Standing Committee comprises the Departmental Heads/Chief Executive Officers of the relevant Commonwealth/State/Territory and New Zealand government agencies responsible for natural resource policy issues in these areas. Papua New Guinea is a formal observer. The NRMSC is jointly chaired by the Secretaries of the Departments of Environment and Heritage and Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

3.14 The NRMSC's main objectives are to support the NRMCC in the achievement of its objectives and to develop cooperative and coordinated approaches to matters of concern to the NRMCC. The NRMSC:

- Directs the work of its subordinate committees;
- Secures cooperation between members; and
- Advises Council on the initiation, review and development of Standing Committee activities.

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5     ibid, p. 56.

6     ibid, p. 64.

3.15 Two major advisory committees underpin the work of the NRMSC. They are the Natural Resource Policies and Programs Committee and the Marine and Coastal Committee.

3.16 The Natural Resource Policies and Programs Committee (NRPPC) was created in early 2004 through the amalgamation of the previous Programs Committee and the Land, Water and Biodiversity Committee. High priority issues selected to set the direction for the NRPPC work plan for the 12 months to March 2005 are:

- NRM decision-making;
- biodiversity decline;
- soil and water quality decline;
- water policy – developing a complementary role to several multi-jurisdictional issues;
- climate change and adaptation;
- effectiveness of regional NRM delivery; and
- invasive species.<sup>7</sup>

3.17 NRPPC also liaises with the Marine and Coastal Committee and other relevant bodies as appropriate on matters relevant to the NRPPC.

3.18 The role of the Marine and Coastal Committee includes advising and supporting the NRMSC on issues of national significance relating to the conservation and ecologically sustainable development of marine and coastal ecosystems and resources.

3.19 The National Introduced Marine Pest Coordination Committee reports to the NRMSC and the Australian Transport Ministerial Council through this committee.

### **Primary Industries Ministerial Council (PIMC)**

3.20 The Primary Industries Ministerial Council (PIMC) consists of the Commonwealth/State/Territory and New Zealand government ministers responsible for agriculture, food, fibre, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture industries/production and rural adjustment policy. The PIMC results from the amalgamation of the previous ministerial councils, ARMCANZ and MCFFA, that dealt with elements of these issues.

3.21 The PIMC is the peak government forum for consultation, coordination and, where appropriate, integration of action by governments on primary industries issues. It first met in May 2002. The objective of the PIMC is:

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7 Ministerial Council website at: [www.mincos.gov.au/nrm\\_sc\\_committees.htm](http://www.mincos.gov.au/nrm_sc_committees.htm).

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to develop and promote sustainable, innovative and profitable agriculture, fisheries/aquaculture, and food and forestry industries<sup>8</sup>

### ***Primary Industries Standing Committee***

3.22 The PIMC is supported by the Primary Industries Standing Committee (PISC). The Standing Committee comprises the chief executive officers of the relevant Commonwealth/State/Territory and New Zealand government agencies responsible for policy in these areas.

3.23 The PIMC is more of a peripheral player on issues of invasive species than the NRMCC, however, it has the scope to become involved in invasive species issues that have an affect on primary production.

### **National Strategies and Committees**

3.24 The management of established pests is fundamentally the responsibility of State, Territory and Local Governments as well as landholders and industry. However, the Commonwealth plays a major role in developing the strategic framework that stakeholders implement.

The Commonwealth strongly encourages cooperation and partnerships between community organisations and government at all levels so that all Australians take joint responsibility for the environment.<sup>9</sup>

3.25 Cooperative arrangements also exist between the Commonwealth, States and Territories to assist in identifying and responding to invasive species.

### ***Australian Weeds Committee***

3.26 The Australian Weeds Committee (AWC) provides an inter-governmental mechanism for identification and resolution of weed issues at a national level. The AWC has existed in various forms since 1996 and in September 2002, following the restructuring of the Ministerial Councils, the AWC members became responsible for all weeds in their jurisdiction (primary industries, forestry and environmental).

3.27 The AWCs purpose is:

To provide an inter-Governmental mechanism for identification and resolution of weed issues at a National level for Australia.<sup>10</sup>

3.28 The role of the Australian Weeds Committee is to develop policy and programs for a national response to weeds to ensure an integrated approach to all aspects of weed management. In its submission the ACT Government notes that the

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8 *ibid.*

9 Natural Heritage Trust, *Annual Report 2001-02*, p 12.

10 Australian Weeds Committee website at: [www.weeds.org.au/awc.htm](http://www.weeds.org.au/awc.htm) -.

success of the Australian Weeds Committee is, in part, due to the level of support that it receives and the fact that there is a funded secretariat.<sup>11</sup>

3.29 The AWC has developed the National Weeds Strategy and established a Weeds of National Significance list. The National Weeds Strategy provides the framework to reduce the impact of weeds on the sustainability of Australia's productive capacity and natural ecosystems, through the establishment of a number of goals, objectives for action and outcomes.

3.30 To be successful, the Strategy requires a cooperative approach between all levels of government, industry, land holders and land and water managers, community groups and the general public.

3.31 The Strategy is implemented by governments and industry on advice from the Australian Weeds Committee.

### ***Vertebrate Pests Committee***

3.32 The Vertebrate Pests Committee is a sub-committee of the NRPPC, under the Natural Resource Management Standing Committee.<sup>12</sup>

3.33 The Vertebrate Pests Committee comprises one member from each Australian State/Territory, and New Zealand. The CSIRO, Bureau of Rural Sciences, Department of Environment and Heritage and Biosecurity Australia also provide one member each. The breadth of the issues considered by the Vertebrate Pests Committee requires a whole of government approach from each jurisdiction. This is achieved through a range of inter-agency communications and through more formal processes such as the NSW Pest Animal Council.<sup>13</sup>

3.34 The Vertebrate Pests Committee identifies nationally significant vertebrate pest issues, recommends appropriate management actions, and develops principles, national policies, strategies and programs relating to vertebrate pests to ensure the conservation, sustainable use and management of Australia's land, water and biological resources.<sup>14</sup>

3.35 In its submission the ACT Government noted that the ability of the Vertebrate Pests Committee to coordinate and disseminate information is hindered by the absence of a funded secretariat.<sup>15</sup>

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11 ACT Government, *Submission 44*, p. 7.

12 Bureau of Rural Sciences, *Submission 62a*, p. 14.

13 E. Davis, *The roles of the Vertebrate Pests Committee in improving the humaneness of pest animal control*, RSPCA Australian Scientific Seminar, 2003, p. 6.

14 Department of Environment and Heritage, *Submission 61*, p. 9.

15 ACT Government, *Submission 44*, p. 8.

3.36 The Vertebrate Pests Committee monitors research in each jurisdiction but is not resourced to conduct research. The Vertebrate Pests Committee strongly supports research to develop new or improved control techniques and understanding of vertebrate pest biology and ecology.<sup>16</sup>

3.37 At the public hearing on 18 June 2004 the Committee was advised that a national vertebrate pest strategy is being initiated by the Vertebrate Pests Committee.<sup>17</sup> The Committee heard that the intention is for the national strategy to address the impact and management of invasive animal species and will have a similar approach to that developed for weeds under the National Weeds Strategy.

### ***National Introduced Marine Pests Coordination Group (NIMPCG)<sup>18</sup>***

3.38 The NIMPCG and the Coordinating Committee for Introduced Marine Pest Emergencies (CCIMPE) were established in 2000 as an interim mechanism pending the development of a comprehensive national system for the Prevention and Management of Introduced Marine Pest Incursions. NIMPCG is developing a national strategy for managing introduced marine pests. The national strategy will cover potential introductions via all vectors, including vessels, aquaculture and the aquarium trade.<sup>19</sup>

3.39 The NIMPCG was established to recommend detailed reforms to implement a national system for the Prevention and Management of Introduced Marine Pest Incursions. The NIMPMC reports to the NRMMC, through the NRMSC, and to the Australian Transport Council (ATC). The ATC is a Ministerial forum for Commonwealth, State and Territory consultations and provides advice to governments on the coordination and integration of all transport and road policy issues at a national level including. The scope of the NIMPCG includes:

- Prevention systems operating at the pre-border, border and post-border levels;
- Coordinated emergency response to new incursions (implemented through CCIMPE under interim arrangements);
- Ongoing control of introduced marine pests already in Australia;
- Supporting components for research and development, community preparedness, education and training; and
- Explicit agreement on the statutory framework of the National System, and secure funding arrangements.

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16 E. Davis, *The roles of the Vertebrate Pests Committee in improving the humaneness of pest animal control*, 2003 RSPCA Australian Scientific Seminar, p. 7.

17 Dr Rhondda Dickson, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2004, p. 56.

18 Department of Environment and Heritage, *Submission 61*.

19 Queensland Government, *Submission 43*, p. 21.

3.40 Preliminary work on the national system has included identifying the requirements for a system to regulate the ballast water of both international and coastal shipping, and on a framework for the management of hull fouling pests. Further development is contingent on finalising the agreement between governments on the legislative and financial framework.

3.41 In late 2002 a High Level Officials Group (HLG) was formed by the NRMCC to provide advice on appropriate legislative, governance and funding approaches for the implementation of the national system. The HLG has conducted extensive consultation with stakeholders, including the shipping, aquarium, aquaculture, fishing and tourism industries and its report was submitted to the NRMSC for discussion at its October 2003 meeting.<sup>20</sup> It was also considered by the Australian Transport Council.

3.42 Dr Bax, Senior Research Scientist, CSIRO Marine Research, told the Committee that the national system will be a fully costed model, with costs being shared by government and industry. Consequently, an intergovernmental agreement needs to be developed before a national system can be put in place.<sup>21</sup>

3.43 The CSIRO submission stated that the impact of measures, to all stakeholders, recommended in the HLG report, would be \$40m per annum. The shipping industry is expected to bear a cost of approximately \$21m per annum, a significant portion of which it is already carrying in relation to ballast water management and anti-fouling measures.<sup>22</sup> The CSIRO noted that industry is already bearing significant costs in relation to managing marine pests, such as through ballast water exchange, anti-fouling of vessels and the cleaning of aquaculture equipment. However, it also noted that industry is likely to be significant beneficiaries of measures to address the threat posed by marine pests.<sup>23</sup>

3.44 An area that is not covered in the budget laid down by the HLG is ongoing management and control research of marine pests. At the public hearing in Adelaide Dr Bax, Senior Research Scientist, CSIRO Marine Research, stated that:

Most of the national systems is directed to prevention and therefore there are management standards and protocols; legislation will be introduced to reduce the risk of further spread of the species around Australia and also more species coming into Australia. The area which I see as lacking is the response to those species which are already here. Could we, for example, develop techniques to reduce their abundance and therefore reduce their spread around the rest of the country?<sup>24</sup>

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20 CSIRO, *Submission 34*, p. 27.

21 Dr Nicholas Bax, *Committee Hansard*, Adelaide, 28 June 2004, p. 33.

22 CSIRO, *Submission 34*, p. 27.

23 *ibid*, p. 28.

24 Dr Nicholas Bax, *Committee Hansard*, Adelaide, 28 June 2004, p. 33.



3.45 One of the key reasons why Australia is able to implement a national strategy for marine invasives is due to the significant body of research in this area that has been conducted by the CSIRO since the Centre for Research on Introduced Marine Pests was established in 1994.<sup>25</sup> This research has been funded through the CSIRO, shipping industry, NHT grants and other sources. It has conducted research to establish the extent of the marine pest problem and has assisted in developing tools for preventing further introductions. An example of these tools is the adoption of ballast water management practices by AQIS in July 2001. The Committee heard that it took seven years to develop the science that went into the ballast water risk assessment for the ballast water management plan that was introduced in July 2001. The rest of the world has followed Australia's lead through the *International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships Ballast Water & Sediments* which was adopted by consensus at the Diplomatic Conference at the IMO in London in February 2004.

3.46 The need for action to be taken to address marine pests was highlighted by Dr Bax, Senior Research Scientist, CSIRO Marine Research, who told the Committee that:

The management of marine pests has the opportunity to provide major environmental benefits to both industry and other areas. An interesting thing in the marine environment is that a lot of effort now is being put in to establishing marine protected areas around the country as a way of protecting biodiversity. But if those marine protected areas get invaded by marine pests, as some of them are already, then that significantly reduces their environmental value. So marine pests need to be one of the suite of management actions which occur in the marine environment.<sup>26</sup>

3.47 Developing on this point, Dr Bax told the Committee that:

my perspective as a scientist is that it took us seven years to produce the science which went into the ballast water risk assessment for the ballast water management plan introduced in July 2001. It is going to take us equally long to develop management and control techniques for existing species, and we really need to start now if we want to have a response in the next 10 years or so.<sup>27</sup>

3.48 The Committee hopes that national strategy will recognise this issue and support research to help preserve and protect marine biodiversity from invasive species.

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25 CSIRO, *Submission 34*, p. 28.

26 Dr Nicholas Bax, *Committee Hansard*, Adelaide, 28 June 2004, p. 30.

27 *ibid*, p. 33.

## **Coordinating Committee for Introduced Marine Pest Emergencies (CCIMPE)<sup>28</sup>**

3.49 The CCIMPE was established in 2000 as an interim mechanism pending the development of a comprehensive national system for the Prevention and Management of Introduced Marine Pest Incursions. CCIMPE consists of relevant agencies of the Australian Government, including CSIRO, and the States and Northern Territory.

3.50 CCIMPE oversees a national emergency response network for marine pests and considers State and Northern Territory requests for access to a national contingency cost-sharing arrangement. Up to \$5 million may be made available to combat an introduced marine pest outbreak of major concern, that meets certain criteria, including being amenable to eradication.

3.51 Dr Bax, Senior Research Scientist, CSIRO Marine Research, advised the CCIMPE has responded to six invasions since 2001. These include Caribbean tube worm in Cairns, caulerpa taxifolia in New South Wales and South Australia and the Northern Pacific Sea Star when it reached Inverloch in Victoria.<sup>29</sup>

3.52 An example of the emergency cost sharing arrangement being accessed is when an infestation of Asian Green Mussels (*Perna viridis*) were identified during cleaning of a seized foreign vessel in Trinity Inlet, Cairns. CCIMPE determined that the first, investigatory, stage of an emergency response was appropriate. This was implemented by the Queensland Government, with the support of \$50,000 from the contingency cost sharing arrangement, and involved the inspection of high-risk vessels, and the removal of any Asian Green Mussels found, as well as ongoing monitoring. A total of 16 mussels were found during March - June 2002, and a further 21 mussels have been subsequently discovered.

### ***Oversights***

3.53 Currently there are no management committees for some species, such as invertebrates or exotic pest fish. The Vertebrate Pests Committee is currently undergoing a review and is considering the inclusion of invasive freshwater fish species as part of their terms of reference.<sup>30</sup> This raises the issue of whether there would be more benefit to the protection of biodiversity if an Exotic Fish Committee was established that looked at fresh water and marine fish, and was not limited to vertebrates.

3.54 In light of the eradication campaigns for the yellow crazy ants on Christmas Island and the Red Imported Fire Ants in Brisbane, another issue that the Committee considers deserves consideration is that of how best to address invertebrate pests.

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28 Department of Environment and Heritage, *Submission 61*.

29 Dr Nicholas Bax, *Committee Hansard*, Adelaide, 28 June 2004, p. 29.

30 ACT Government, *Submission 44*, p. 8.

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## Natural Heritage Trust

3.55 The Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) was established in 1997 with a funding budget of \$1.249 billion. It was to operate from the 1996/97 to the 2001/02 financial year. The main source of funds was from proceeds from the first partial privatisation of Telstra.

3.56 In the 2001 Federal Budget the Government announced an additional \$1 billion for the NHT, extending the funding for an additional 5 years, to 2006/07. Of this \$1 billion, the Government expects to spend at least \$350 million on measures to improve Australia's water quality.

3.57 The Natural Heritage Ministerial Board has approved funding of \$4 million per annum for strategic weed management projects for 2004-05 and 2005-06<sup>31</sup>. The Committee appreciates that the Natural Heritage Ministerial Board has acknowledged the problem of weeds but it notes that \$4 million per annum for strategic weed management projects pales in comparison the \$4 billion per annum that weeds cost the Australian people.

3.58 The NHT website advises:

There has been a fundamental shift in the Trust towards a more targeted approach to environmental and natural resource management in Australia. The Trust will deliver important resource condition outcomes including improved water quality, less erosion, improved estuarine health, improved vegetation management and improved soil condition.<sup>32</sup>

3.59 Under the second phase of the NHT, known as NHT2, grant arrangements have changed. The 'Framework for the implementation of the Natural Heritage Trust extension' provides a strategic basis for investment against the NHT's objectives at national, regional and local levels and includes the basis for matching contributions from the states and territories.

3.60 NHT2 has three overarching objectives. They are:

- Biodiversity Conservation;
- Sustainable use of Natural Resources; and
- Community Capacity Building and Institutional Change.

3.61 NHT programs have been consolidated from twenty-three programs under NHT1 to four programs under NHT2.

- The **Landcare Program** will invest in activities that contribute to reversing land degradation and promoting sustainable agriculture.

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31 Mr Charles Willcocks, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2004, p. 55.

32 The Natural Heritage Trust website at: [www.nht.gov.au/about-nht.html](http://www.nht.gov.au/about-nht.html).

- The **Bushcare Program** will invest in activities that contribute to conserving and restoring habitat for the native flora and fauna which underpin the health of the landscape.
- The **Rivercare Program** will invest in activities that contribute to improved water quality and environmental conditions in river systems and wetlands.
- The **Coastcare Program** will invest in activities that contribute to protecting coastal catchments, ecosystems and the marine environment.

### ***Funding arrangements***

3.62 Under NHT2 funds will be delivered at three levels:

- National investments;
- Regional investments; and
- A local action component.

3.63 National investments will cover national priorities, addressing activities that have a national or broad-scale, rather than a regional or local outcome. This will include Commonwealth only activities, state-wide activities and those that cross State, Territory and regional boundaries. It also addresses matters of direct Commonwealth jurisdiction, such as those relating to Commonwealth waters. Funding for national delivery components will generally be determined by the Commonwealth Government, without calls for funding applications from the public. Proposals for statewide funding will be made by the State and Commonwealth Governments.<sup>33</sup>

3.64 Regional investments are the principal delivery mechanism for NHT2. The model for regional investment under NHT2 is based on that used for the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. Where appropriate the model developed for the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality should be followed.

Under this model, investment is made on the basis of a regional natural resource management plan, incorporating the major natural resource management issues in the area.<sup>34</sup>

3.65 Agreement between the Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments is to be reached in relation to activities that are given funding at the regional level. Contributions from the Commonwealth Government are to be matched with cash or in-kind contributions from State or Territories.

3.66 The Committee is encouraged that the national competitive component and the regional competitive component recognise the fact that some natural resource issues are better addressed on a larger scale, rather than on a single region approach

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33 *ibid.*

34 *ibid.*

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and allow for cross-regional collaboration. Each of these components allows for cross-regional projects and also multiyear projects.<sup>35</sup>

3.67 The move to provide support for multi-year projects is also welcomed by the Committee as it heard considerable evidence regarding the constraints of annual funding cycles.

3.68 At the local level community groups will be able to apply for individual grants through the Commonwealth Government Envirofund. These grants provide up to \$30,000 to address local natural resource management issues. It is aimed at groups that have had little or no previous engagement with the NHT and aims to assist groups to undertake:

- small on-ground projects tackling local problems;
- projects in areas where regional plans are not yet well developed; and
- important local projects.

3.69 As will be discussed in Chapter 4, evidence presented to the Committee indicated that there were a number of concerns regarding the Natural Resource Management approach to funding and short funding cycles.

### **Natural Resource Management – the local approach to funding**

3.70 The 'Framework for the Extension of the Natural Heritage Trust' states that one of the ten areas of activity that define the scope of the NHT is:

preventing or controlling the introduction and spread of feral animals, aquatic pests, weeds and other biological threats to biodiversity;<sup>36</sup>

3.71 It also states that:

natural resource management priorities will vary between regions and between States/Territories, as will the extent to which the areas of activity identified for Trust investment are addressed in regional plans.<sup>37</sup>

3.72 As a consequence of these variations the NHT acknowledges that each regional plan will not necessarily address all the ten areas of activity of the NHT and that equal emphasis may not be applied to all components of a single area of activity within a regional plan.

3.73 Dr Pressland, General Manager, Catchment and Regional Planning, Queensland Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy told the Committee of the different funding structure under NHT2.

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35 Mr Simon Murnane, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2004, p. 61.

36 The Natural Heritage Trust website at: [www.nht.gov.au/publications/framework/index.htm](http://www.nht.gov.au/publications/framework/index.htm),

37 *ibid.*

The grants under NHT2 are very different from under NHT1. The majority of the funds go to regional bodies. For example, in Queensland we are establishing 15 regional groups throughout the state to deal with programs such as NAP and NHT. The majority of the NHT funding goes directly through those bodies to address issues of priority that are identified in NRM plans, which those groups have developed.<sup>38</sup>

3.74 Mr Willcocks, General Manager, Landcare and Sustainable Industries, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry told the Committee that:

The major investment under the Natural Heritage Trust is to address regional priorities identified in accredited regional natural resource management plans and investment strategies. Weed management may be funded through the trust and it is possible to obtain three-year funding for such priority projects.<sup>39</sup>

3.75 The Committee heard evidence critical of the regional focus of the Commonwealth Governments' move to providing funding under the NHT to NRM bodies, which would then have responsibility for allocating the monies to projects they identify as priorities. A number of witnesses expressed concern that invasive species will not be addressed unless they are given priority over competing issues by the NRM bodies.

3.76 While discussing this arrangement Dr McFadyen, CEO, CRC for Australian Weed Management told the Committee that:

The other problem with the regional bodies is that the funds are given for all natural resource management. So every weed control or invasive species project is competing with water resources and quality problems, riparian issues and erosion and all sorts of other things. Again, there is very often a failure to take a strategic view, because they look at the regional issues.<sup>40</sup>

3.77 A number of witnesses advised that the impact of the regional focus was that funds were allocated to issues that are of priority in the local area. The Committee heard that this may occur at the expense of issues such as sleeper weeds which may have a significantly greater impact on the economy and environment than issues identified by the NRM body but which may not be seen as a priority issue by the local NRM body and therefore not targeted for action.

3.78 The lack of a strategic view can mean that an issue which could have been addressed, in its initial stage, with a small outlay of money may end up costing significantly more in a few years time when it comes to the attention of the NRM body. An example of this is sleeper weeds which often do not come to the attention of

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38 Dr Anthony Pressland, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 14 April 2004, p. 9.

39 Mr Charles Willcocks, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2004, p. 55.

40 Dr Rachel McFadyen, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 14 April 2004, p. 27.

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land owners until they have become a significant weed issue. Developing on this point Dr McFadyen, CEO, CRC for Australian Weed Management told the Committee that:

The problem with that [NHT funding] is that if you are a regional group such as, let us say, the Fitzroy Basin or Burnett-Mary, your weed issues are the things that are currently a serious problem and that is what you apply for money for. Something that you are told will be a serious problem in 40 years time, if you do not do anything now, does not come up.<sup>41</sup>

3.79 Dr Traill, Councillor, Invasive Species Council, told the Committee that the focus of NRMs:

tends to be on things that are already a problem—the things that are almost always, therefore, not eradicable—rather than dealing with something like cecropia, which is not yet a problem for any land-holder; it is not a problem for anyone right now, so there is no reason that any individual or any Landcare group would think to apply for it, unless they were particularly sophisticated in seeing the future.<sup>42</sup>

3.80 Dr Traill went on to say:

NRM committees are usually focused on dealing with existing uneradicable pests, not sleepers or ones just starting off their life cycle.<sup>43</sup>

3.81 In response to the issue of whether NRM bodies will identify new incursions of invasive species as priority issues in their area Mr Wonder, Deputy Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, said:

If people on the ground, familiar with their regional area, are talking to one another and conscious of the issues that they feel they need to address either now or into the future, they have every opportunity to make a judgement about what is there now, what might be there in the future, what might be threatening and the like. They can make all of those judgements. It is not confined to things reaching a particular size before they are allowed to put them forward in regional plan, so I do not agree with that characterisation. These issues can be addressed in advance if they feel that they are of such significance that they want to do something about them.<sup>44</sup>

3.82 The Committee expresses its concern over Mr Wonder's final sentence:

These issues can be addressed in advance if they feel that they are of such significance that they want to do something about them.<sup>45</sup>

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41 *ibid*, p. 27.

42 Dr Barry Traill, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 14 April 2004, p. 49.

43 *ibid*, p. 54.

44 Mr Bernard Wonder, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2004, p. 63.

45 *ibid*.

3.83 The places the onus on the NRM body having sufficient knowledge to be aware of the future impact of newly establishing or sleeper invasive species and to be prepared to address the issue in its early stages. The Committee is concerned that this level of knowledge and foresight may not be present in all NRM bodies, or may not be the majority voice on the body and therefore the issue will not be adequately resourced.

3.84 The Committee heard that the regional focus of NHT2 is about empowering NRM bodies to address issues that they identify as priorities. Mr Wonder, Deputy Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, told the Committee that:

to go to your question of where do invasive species fit vis-a-vis the other issues facing them, yes, it would be fair to say they [NRM bodies] have to make realistic judgements about what are the issues that they can best address and take forward their natural resource management and environment aspirations. I agree that is a very relevant consideration and that we have to make some judgements about where invasive species fit vis-a-vis other matters. Sometimes I would expect it to be much higher on the list. I think it will vary, depending on the regional circumstances and the significance of weeds vis-a-vis other issues they are addressing in that particular region.<sup>46</sup>

3.85 The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) noted that the current funding arrangements do not allow for issues not identified as priority issues by NRM bodies to be addressed. The LGAQ noted that:

if additional resources were provided it would enable those additional species to be controlled. For instance, with hymenachne it might allow control in those areas where it is not seen as a specific problem. I know from a local government point of view that they [local government] have limited resources and they make decisions as to where they are going to best spend those limited resources for that year and the next few years, and other things do not get addressed as part of that.<sup>47</sup>

3.86 Evidence overwhelming supports the argument that one of the most cost-effective methods of managing the issue is to address problem species before they have become widely established. The Committee expresses concern that funding arrangements under NHT2 are contrary to this.

3.87 The Committee expresses concern that the funding arrangements for NHT2 may mean that invasive species become further established in Australia as, unless they are identified as priority issues by a NRM, they will not receive adequate funding to enable them to be addressed.

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46 *ibid*, p. 63.

47 Mr Steve Greenwood, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 14 April 2004, p. 61.



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### *Local response to national issues*

3.88 Funding through the National Weeds Program, that was established under the first phase of the NHT, contributed to the development and implementation of national strategies for the 20 individual Weeds of National Significance. A number of witnesses advised that this program had been effective at strategically addressing weed issues. Mr Walton, Senior Policy Officer, Ecology, Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy, Queensland Government, advised that the program:

is effectively rolling up. I believe there is an extension of a year for coordinators—it is obviously really important to have a coordinator for the species. The projects themselves will now be funded under NHT2 at a regional level.<sup>48</sup>

3.89 Funding for the management of weeds of national significance is not guaranteed under NHT2, to receive funding the issue needs to be a priority for the NRM body. Dr Dickson, Assistant Secretary, Natural Resource Management Policy Branch, Department of Environment and Heritage advised that:

Once there is a regional plan accredited and a regional investment strategy agreed, with various components which could include managing or supporting control of weeds of national significance...<sup>49</sup>

3.90 Concern was expressed by a number of witnesses that under NHT2 funding for national weeds, such as hymenachne, is required to be sought through NRMs for local response. The Committee heard from Mr Low, Councillor, Invasive Species Council, who argued that responding locally to national pest issues is not appropriate. He told the Committee that:

One of the problems that have been identified for me through the hymenachne management group is that they have been told that to get funding to control hymenachne they are supposed to go through the NRMs, the regional groups. This is not an appropriate process for a national weed. It depends on those groups deciding that that particular weed is a priority for them, and you are going to get an uneven approach. This is not consistent. If you are saying that this is a national weed, it needs a national response; but then you decentralise the funding.<sup>50</sup>

3.91 The Committee heard evidence that the ability of a number of NRMs to reach agreement to adequately fund weeds of national significance in an area is difficult to achieve. The LGAQ expressed concern over the alignment of funding to NRM groups and NRMs determining funding priorities in relation to weeds, especially the management of weeds of national significance. It advised that a return to the older

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48 Mr Craig Walton, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 14 April 2004, p. 11.

49 Dr Rhondda Dickson, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2004, p. 61.

50 Mr Tim Low, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 14 April 2004, p. 48.

model of funding for weeds of national significance may result in more favourable outcomes. Mr Petrie, Natural Resource Management Project Coordinator, LGAQ told the Committee that:

It was quite evident to me that the process of funding, which has now been realigned to the NRM groups, is of concern for local governments, in that getting all the regional bodies to understand the priority of weeds of national significance is going to take a lot of resources. To achieve some adequate funding across a number of regional bodies to actually deal with the problem is obviously going to be a major challenge.

It would probably be far more favourable if it went back to the older model whereby applicants received funding directly from the Commonwealth to manage weeds of national significance. There are concerns about how the process has been devolved to those regional bodies and about the lack of real support for those bodies to understand that these are high priorities, because some of them have not even reflected weeds in the context of agricultural importance. When you look at the NHT you see that weed management aligns to environmentally significant areas only, so there are limitations on where that can be impacted. Also, through the national action plan, where there is substantially more money available to the NRM groups that qualify, weeds have to relate primarily to water quality issues. It is difficult for applicants to put in a project for funding that will target an invasive species that will have an impact on environmentally significant areas.<sup>51</sup>

3.92 Further developing on the issue of weed management Mr Petrie told the Committee that:

The key issue is getting a model that effectively deals with infestation, and I do not think the current proposal is going to support that.<sup>52</sup>

3.93 Another issue that witnesses identified with the NRM structure is that they reflect local concerns and as peoples' definitions of what is a weed or pest animal is not universal the outcome is that there will often be different responses to the same issue. Mr Low highlighted this when he told the Committee that:

because of differing values, you would not expect all NRMs to treat hymenachne equally as a weed; in fact, some of them are likely to refuse to take it seriously.<sup>53</sup>

3.94 Mr Stewart, Vice President, AgForce Cattle, AgForce Queensland, provided support to the case against a regional funding focus when he told the Committee that:

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51 Mr Malcolm Petrie, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 14 April 2004, p. 64.

52 *ibid*, p. 65.

53 Mr Tim Low, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 14 April 2004, p. 48.

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Landcare groups obviously get funded through the NHT and so on, but Landcare groups tend to look at their own region. National Landcare probably look at the national situation, but I think that generally the Landcare groups—and I established the Townsville-Thuringowa Landcare group in 1990, so I have a bit of a background in what they look at—really concentrate on what is happening in their area. With regard to what is happening elsewhere, there is not a great deal of knowledge that passes on from one Landcare group to another. ... I suppose with regional funding, too, it depends on who has the best story or the best connection—<sup>54</sup>

3.95 In response to claims that NRMs have broad strategic focus and that their membership is local and may not have expertise, Mr Wonder, Deputy Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, advised that:

In New South Wales you have catchment management boards and in Victoria you have catchment management authorities and the like. In those two instances, they are legislative and are appointed people who look at the welfare and issues facing a very considerable geographic region. I do not think it is appropriate to describe them as 'local'.<sup>55</sup>

3.96 Mr Murnane, Director, Policy and Governance Section, Natural Resource Management Team, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry explained the accreditation process for NRM bodies.

the regional NRM groups are asked to identify the key priorities for natural resource management within their regions, and they put those plans to the Australian and relevant state or territory governments for a process that we call accreditation. On the basis of those plans, the regions then put to us investment strategies with a three-year time horizon to allow the funding of multiyear projects. Those investment plans are reviewed annually so emerging or changing priorities can be reflected in the investment decisions the governments make.<sup>56</sup>

3.97 Under NHT2 NRMs allocate resources to priority areas that they have identified, in their region. This is in conflict with the overwhelming evidence that the spread of pest animals and weeds is often not stopped by physical barriers and certainly not stopped by ephemeral borders such as entering a new catchment management zone. A lack of agreement on pest issues, across NRMs and more widely, can mean that pests may not be effectively managed if they are being treated in one area but not in neighbouring catchment zones. This can void the endeavours of NRMs that manage pests.

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54 Mr John Stewart, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 14 April 2004, p. 73.

55 Mr Bernard Wonder, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2004, p. 63.

56 Mr Simon Murnane, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2004, p. 61.

3.98 An example of the detrimental impact of lack of the coordination in the management of invasive species was highlighted by Mr Stewart, Vice President, AgForce Cattle, AgForce Queensland. He told the Committee that:

We have had a whole lot of land-holders who have been doing work on feral pigs and the neighbour does not do it and, therefore, in 12 months he is back just where he was before. That is why we need a national, coordinated program.<sup>57</sup>

3.99 The establishment of NRMs and the focal role that they play as the central decision maker on funding for pest and weed management has led to the creation of a bureaucratic structure. The LGAQ told the Committee that local governments' role in managing pest animals and weeds had not changed, however, under the new NRM model local government must apply to the NRM for funds to undertake tasks which are additional to core business. The Committee heard that:

if the money goes to the bodies, it will still be local government that ends up doing the work, but they will have to apply to the bodies to get the money to do the work.<sup>58</sup>

3.100 The Committee expresses concern regarding indications that traditional funding is being reduced as a result of new funding being received through the NHT. State Government expenditure for environmental matters has reduced as NHT funding has increased. Mr Petrie, Natural Resource Management Project Coordinator, Local Government Association of Queensland told the Committee that:

Essentially, the state agencies' support and extension services have diminished since the introduction of the regional NRM bodies. An example would be that one body is now employing a soil conservation officer, which was identified as a core service provided by a state agency that no longer occurs. That seems to be a common theme of concern throughout a lot of the regions in Queensland. So I would say that there is some correlation there.<sup>59</sup>

3.101 There seems to be common concern amongst local governments and other stakeholders with the introduction of the regional NRM framework in Queensland.

### ***Length of the funding cycle***

3.102 Under the first phase of the NHT funds were generally provided for a 12 month period. If additional funds were required, to continue projects beyond one year, they had to be reapplied for. The short-term nature of the grant cycle meant that funds could not always be strategically applied. Evidence the Committee heard supports the

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57 Mr John Stewart, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 14 April 2004, p. 69.

58 Mr Malcolm Petrie, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 14 April 2004, p. 65.

59 *ibid*, p. 67.

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argument that the management of invasive species is a long-term issue and the provision of funds on an annual basis is problematic.

3.103 The Committee notes that this issue has been identified and addressed under NHT2 which allows for more strategic work through changed funding arrangements that accommodate for multiyear projects.

3.104 The short-term nature of funding caused problems for a number of witnesses. Issues identified as a result of this included a reduced ability to strategically plan and higher staff turnover on research projects.

3.105 Dr Peacock, CEO, Pest Animal Control CRC told the Committee that:

It is almost a study in worst practice research funding. I have done 10 years of research management. No-one funds for one year on long-term projects except EA. I do not have any other clients that do that.<sup>60</sup>

3.106 The short-term nature of the grants also meant that organisations were required to reapply for grants on an annual basis. A number of witnesses commented that this was not an effective use of resources and resulted in a lower level of return for money spent than if funding had been received in three-year blocks.

3.107 An example of the detrimental impact of funding for a hymenachne eradication campaign ending and continued funding not being received was provided by Mr Petrie. He advised that the program was:

coming to the conclusion of that [2001/02] funding period. I believe there were a number of local governments that applied for the control of that particular species. A total of about \$470,000 was committed to, off the top of my head, three or four councils in Far North Queensland. The funding was to enable those councils with limited resources to deal with that particular species and focus on that eradication, which is what they intended to do. The interesting process was that the funding ran out when those councils had actually come very close to eradication, but, given the time frame to get additional funding for the next round of NHT, with the whole regional planning and so on, as a consequence they are actually back to where they started. So those resources were totally wasted as a result.<sup>61</sup>

3.108 Dr Morin, Senior Research Scientist, CSIRO told the Committee that:

To make a proper plan of, say, delivery over three years would be so much more efficient than every year having to rewrite the grant. What I find is that for the same amount of money that we get over the three years we deliver much less because it is so fragmented. For something like producing, let us say, a brochure, because we have only one-year funding

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60 Dr Tony Peacock, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 26 November 2003, p. 14.

61 Mr Malcolm Petrie, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 14 April 2004, p. 64.

we are going to produce just what we need for that year, but actually the year after we get more funding.<sup>62</sup>

3.109 Dr Peacock also advised the Committee of the short turnaround time for applying for tenders.

For example, two tenders were let on Christmas Eve last year for a mid-January date for feral goat research. You read that and think, 'What are they thinking?'<sup>63</sup>

3.110 In response to criticisms of the short-term nature of NHT funding, and its impact on research, Dr Dickson advised that:

In terms of the NHT funding of biological controls, the NHT is not a research funding program.<sup>64</sup>

3.111 The Committee heard evidence from the Department of Environment and Heritage that most of the NHT funds that have been provided to assist some of the major research institutions, such as CSIRO, to undertake biological controls have been at the applied end of the spectrum. Dr Dickson told the Committee that:

[the] CSIRO estimate that it can be up to 10 years from the first idea through to developing a final biological control. It is clearly a long-term activity and it needs to be undertaken in a strategic way by research institutions. The NHT has certainly provided some important assistance to that work of the major research institutions, and also in state research as well, to assist the promulgation of the biological controls and further testing at the applied end.<sup>65</sup>

3.112 Although there is scope for research organisations to apply for grants under the National Competitive Component of NHT2, Mr Murnane, reinforced the point that the NHT is not a research funding program when he said:

the Natural Heritage Trust is essentially a funding program for on-ground environmental works rather than being specifically designed to support research, but there is scope to support particular projects that may have an applied result later on.<sup>66</sup>

3.113 Further developing on the issue of research and development, Mr Wonder noted that the Commonwealth has major funding of research and development

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62 Dr Louise Morin, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2004, p. 6.

63 Dr Tony Peacock, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 26 November 2003, p. 14.

64 Dr Rhondda Dickson, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2004, p. 60.

65 *ibid*, p. 60.

66 Mr Simon Murnane, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2004, p. 62.

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through the rural industries research and development corporations. Many of which fund invasive species projects that are conducted through the CSIRO or CRCs.<sup>67</sup>

3.114 In June 2004 the Commonwealth Government announced that ten environmental projects would receive \$5.6 million in funding over the next three years as part of the National Competitive Component of NHT2. Funding was provided to multi-year projects that were new, innovative or pilot activities with a national approach to effectively improving natural resource management.

3.115 The Committee is please to note that invasive species were recognised in the grants cycle through the grant to the CRC for Australian Weed Management to build a national, community-based model for preventing new weed incursions. They received \$138,000 over three years.<sup>68</sup>

3.116 The Committee heard that:

A lot of the national funding from the NHT on weeds and feral animals, as well as on the research side, has gone into communication products and improving the capacity of regional groups and other community groups to be able to identify weeds or other invasive species. The key issue is the complementarity between improving the national framework and the coordination and improving the ownership and the focus at the regional level. It is not one or the other; it is both of these things working together.<sup>69</sup>

3.117 The Committee expresses its hope that NHT2 will be successful in achieving these goals and that it will make a positive contribution toward reducing the impact of invasive species.

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67 Mr Bernard Wonder, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2004, p. 62.

68 The Hon. Warren Truss, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and The Hon. David Kemp, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, *\$5.6 million for innovative environmental work*, media release, 10 June 2004.

69 Dr Rhondda Dickson, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2004, p. 64.

