Champions group meeting
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Report

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Note:
The following report reflects the opinions and insights of an NRM service provider and invited organizations. These opinions do not necessarily reflect the mandate or position of NRM or DEA.
Contents

Key reflections: ........................................................................................................................................ 3
Key actions identified: ................................................................................................................................. 4
Session 1: Welcome and opening remarks ............................................................................................... 6
  Introductions........................................................................................................................................ 7
Session 2: Regional Leadership Panel ...................................................................................................... 10
Session 3 ............................................................................................................................................... 13
  Session 3: ........................................................................................................................................ 16
Exercise 4 ............................................................................................................................................... 17
  Reflections: ........................................................................................................................................ 17
Exercise 5 ............................................................................................................................................... 19
  Closing............................................................................................................................................... 19
Annexure 1 ........................................................................................................................................... 20
Day 1  Overall reflections .......................................................................................................................... 20
Day 2  Observers’ feedback ......................................................................................................................... 20
Annexure 2: Pictures................................................................................................................................. 21
Key reflections:
Being a sector leader means the LUI model should facilitate private sector partnership and investment. There is a need to revisit communication, awareness and capacity building to improve interactions between lower levels and higher levels; and capacitate PCs about community engagement approaches and resources to perform an awareness raising and advocacy functions.
There is a need to focus on and prioritise reskilling to help the staff learn new things. However, there were questions around how the reskilling process is unfolding, and for reflection to be employed in the desired outcome.
There is a need to revisit the policy that governs the role of project advisory committees as these committees are dysfunctional in Limpopo, and run very differently in different regions.
The work done on branding that was so apparent in earlier years has waned somewhat. There is a need to engage in conversations on how to embody the NRM brand again through advocacy, communications materials, working gear, etc.
Some regions sense that they’re losing the control they had under the direct contracting model. There is a need to discuss the change of role, what that means for how individuals and teams work, and the administrative baggage that is engaged with.
Working for Wetlands has, since 2003, worked with implementing agents. Some implementing agents are just glorified contractors. What are the LUIs bringing to the party? You need to work with people with the capacity and tenacity to bring other resources on board. It took an engagement with Tshwane Metro over 10 years to have them on board for funding contribution. To date, landowners are prepared to contribute. However, the mechanisms are not clearly in place. On training – to stimulate LUIs to unlock resources, training is essential. Good training will ensure compliance and control of processes. How do we understand the receiving environment? There is a need to unpack their processes in order to learn from them. The LUI is clearly an area where a lot of learning and thinking needs to happen. Where is the space where this conversation needs to happen so that we can learn around this issue? Where is the focused conversation going to happen? How will we clarify and define the real difference between an LUI and an implementing entity? There needs to be a technical platform for this.
On the question of resistance – it’s currently happening nationally. There is a feeling that the LUI is an animal coming to eat everyone. People have said they weren’t prepared for the change. The actual problem is that we’ve created a dependency through direct contracting that isn’t competitive. We need to work on how we change the mind-set of people towards being true SMMEs. Being threatened by political parties – and a perception that NRM is moving from poverty relief to benefitting white people are issues. There must be a plan to assist provinces with these issues that emerge.
There is a need to ensure that we are making our work relevant: Our value to society is at stake. Society has to internalise the value of nature, and recognised the jobs that have been created. We need to be able to convince society to invest and broaden our definition of investment. Social capital and ecological capital make sense and add value when telling our story. People need to be saying that clearing aliens is a core part of activities for water provision in Cape Town.
Mentoring was noted as important for LUIs, which PCs need to do. A skills audit will soon be underway. There will be a redesign of the functions for PCs and Area Managers, and job evaluations will be conducted. The change management process was noted as an important component of this. Project planning, contract management, advocacy and liaison are all involved in this rejigging. On community engagement – PCs need to be better equipped to engage with local people and local authority in communities to avoid intimidation. How does this fit in to the reskilling process?
We should question our institutional arrangements. It’s not a matter of criticising DEA. There is something to question about the ease of doing business. Our institutional, administrative and legal arrangements need to be optimal.

How do we measure (15 years down the line) that the series of interventions have worked? MAREP is one thing in a basket. We need to strive for various pockets of excellence. A little bit of excellence takes the programme into new spaces. How do we measure excellence?

Engagement with youth was another strong issue – perhaps we should look at this from a participant perspective. The simulation tool being developed by Jules to create learning spaces around nrm is also of note.

On the issue around change management - we need to think more about this. Our LUI problems are confounded by delays in signing contracts. Year after year we have had similar issues, and always say there is another thing that delays this. We need to interrogate these processes and see what we can do.

There are two elements to our vision – the ecosystem impact and resilience, and the livelihood aspect. We need to knit these two together more effective, and take a central cabal of people through this. Before we get to institutional rejigging, we need to know what our lifeblood is. What, within our current arrangements, are not working?

There is a fundamental need to engage in some introspection as a programme. We need to question business as usual. If we don’t keep up with the times, we become irrelevant. The world has changed, and our systems are not robust enough to assimilate the change. We’re struggling with the data, getting contracts signed, selling our product, audit processes, and yet we are growing. We need to stop and take stock, and see how much value we can get by doing a deep introspection to see how best we can get benefit out of what we do. This will help us to realign ourselves to the current changing world, and to develop a smarter system. The NRM Learning Champions’ Group has a role to play in reshaping this world.

DEA NRM is not keeping up with times, NRM’s evolutionary pace is quite slow. What are NRM’s constraints towards innovation? Problems and challenges are identified but solutions are not innovative. We need to escalate this reskilling process somehow.

NRM processes connect with critical realism: What is seen in the landscape has deeper processes that drive it, what is changed in the landscape is the symptom not the cause. NRM deals with symptoms not deep root causes. NRM must work on what is invisible. Change is happening but not the desired change. Many changes happen at higher level, not at ground level.

There is a wealth of knowledge and ideas from DEA, but what is done with those ideas? DEA doesn’t have a good succession plan. “If you train a person, he must be better than you in the future. If he is not, you have failed. In terms of change, LNCG is an agent of change, the purpose of LNCG is to share and pass on what will develop others”.

People are passionate about conservation, they get frustrated with bureaucracy and SCM, -with the desire they have to go extra mile. We are doing conservation but there is no single common message, no learning. We have a communication gap. It takes time to get the message through. We have a disjuncture in messaging. Improve communications, common vision and understand each one’s role.

**Key actions identified:**
It was noted that Working for Wetlands would like to be brought more firmly in to these processes. A request for regional SES MAREP was made by the team.
It was confirmed that there is great value in the SES regional MAREPs, and there was an agreement to continue to extend the footprint of SES MAREPs nation-wide to reinvigorate passion and stimulate the desire to engage in meaningful NRM work in the regions.

It seems like there are very important issues coming out of the regional MAREPs. There needs to be wider engagement to ensure that everyone is on the same level / understanding on how this work is needing to be rolled out. This work needs to be driven from the Champions group.

The North West did a substantial amount of preparation work before the LUI was implemented – and every PC has been linked to an LUI from the beginning. Laying this groundwork has helped with the way that the change has impacted upon team members and the orientation of teams to the shift in the work. There is also an internal induction programme that has been put together that is led by PCs. They are now in the process of assessing these initiatives. There is a need to find a way to package this work so that other regions can draw on it. Vusi agreed to share processes with other regions.

There was a request for a circular around the shift in contracting models. We need timeframes for this.

Working with government money require a proper understanding of Supply Chain Management processes – and there is an identified need to initiate processes to engage with SCM procedures. We need to teach supply chain people about NRM processes and activities. Drawing SCM into a process like this and into the field with PCs to bring some humanity to the issue may create a different sense of collaboration. Similarly, all team members need an improved understanding of compliance and audit regulations.

The relationship of advocacy to LUIs is nuanced. We need to strengthen the process that advocacy ran 18 months ago. Issues around stakeholder engagement, the need for cultural sensitivity, for branding and presentation are at work here. Garth to interrogate this point for further engagement.

There is a need to rephrase the vision and for leadership to write it down does not directly translate it into reality. Wider representation in the LNCG and involvement of higher level members are needed.
Session 1: Welcome and opening remarks
Sarah Polonsky welcomed everyone to the meeting – particularly those that were new to the organisational learning champions group - and asked that everyone switch off devices in order to create a focused space. She noted that the programme of these engagements are typically loose and evolving – and that the focus of this workshop would be orientated towards learning around what is coming out of the regional MAREP engagements to date.

As background, Sarah highlighted the MAREP process as one which focuses on co-creation of knowledge and learning and the value in exchanging ideas across teams and geographic spaces for DEA NRM.

After the national MAREPs and the SES National MAREP in Grahamstown there was a call to conduct more regional engagements. Our initial learning network strategy has evolved as we recognised, through its creation, that it is in fact an organisational learning strategy. This strategy also recognised that there is a need to go in more depth in to how we engage with SES at a regional level.

It was also agreed at the last champions group meeting that we should widen our representation and engage across more tiers and include more of the Working for Wetlands team. Much knowledge in terms of organisational needs and solutions sit in regions and the wider NRM team. This has been addressed in the interim.

Ahmed shared that he was part of the North West/Gauteng regional MAREP. Out of these engagements people are seeing the value that can come out of listening deeply to each other. However, many in the room today are feeling guilty that participants are not in the field, and as such coming in to this room is difficult for some. Within the context of organisational learning, this tension is important to acknowledge. There is a complex series of processes and issues happening between and within regions.

There was an intention shared to unpack some of this at the performance review in Golden Gate.

In some way over the years we’ve lost our ability to convey policy on the ground, and to develop people in the sector to play the role of enabling and driving the sector through skilling ourselves up. There are some ways we could make our sector speak to each other better both from bottom up and top down. There are other institutional processes and learning related activities at play – and it’s important for this group to help pull those threads together.

On the reskilling processes – the group that convened [the previous month] is important. Christo noted he only really speaks up to Deputy Director level.

There are a lot of people still in the old WfW mode – issuing contracts as opposed to working in partnership. This process should speak to these differing approaches. How are we going to let the outcomes of this process spill in to that process, and others?

Linked to work volume, there were a number of apologies to share. Dudu Soginga, Nceba Ngobo, Tapiwa Puling, Brendon Mashabane, Nandipha, Innocent and Werner Roux all sent their regrets.
Introductions

Participants were asked to introduce themselves, their role, how they have related in to MAREPs to date and any question they came in to this meeting with.

Sanet Krugel. Administrative support in Chief Directors Officer

Attended the Limpopo/Mpumalanga MAREP, which was the first time she met PCs in the field, the way theory and practical came together was fascinating to her.

Allan Kaplan: Proteus Initiative

Works in partnership with SANBIs organisational learning practice, and in that sense working with NRM in order to look at processes of learning. Has been involved in thinking through the design of the MAREPs. Attended last regional MAREP. The level at which people think and work was interesting. The question he had was around organisational thinking that supports individual thinking.

Sue Davidoff– Proteus Initiative

Sue had a similar background to Allen. She had been very struck by the level of commitment and enthusiasm at the regional MAREP, and by the scale of the work that needs to be done. A question for her was around how to marry the enthusiasm with the work that needs to be done in ways that don’t burn people out; and how we understand work in NRM – is work just in the field, or thinking work that enables work in the field to be more purposeful.

Malukhanye Mbopha: SANBI; NRM Project Support

Has attended all the regionals, and has had opportunity to do a deep dive into all areas of content. People are passionate on the ground.

Antoinette van Vuuren: Working for Wetlands, finance.

First time engaging with the MAREP process.

Umesh Bahadur: Programme leader of the Working for Wetlands

Fascinated by the different layers of MAREPs, and the different kinds that are emerging. It would be great to trace the best practice at different levels of management and develop different kinds of buy in. How the organisation can actually learn is about how we package it.

Aadilya: Western cape RPL

Noted that she had come to learn and hadn’t engaged in MAREPs to date.

Piet Louis Grundling: responsible for implementation

Had to date only been to MAREPs which have been more technical in nature. He also requested a Working for wetlands regional type of engagement. Staff feeling like step children of NRM. There are some who feel isolated.

The dynamics and differences he’s seen in reskilling workshops have been fascinating.

Sarah Polonsky. Chief Directors Office

Integration of WfWet staff is an important point. There have been stakeholders attending the others. Apologised for lack of participation to date. Need to hold this consciously as we plan.
The question is around the risk of us dabbling / meddling and potentially making things worse if we don’t hold this process meaningfully and in a way that translates in to day to day actions as part of our workplans.

**Tanya Layne: SANBI; Organisational Learning Facilitator**

Had recently changed her title within SANBI – this title change emerged from the work with NRM. Has been involved in facilitating the three regional MAREPs and involved concepts arising from Cape Flats Nature. This process has helped her develop a deeper understanding of the [Cape Flats] work.

The process of the regional MAREPs unfolding has brought a challenge from bringing a set piece to bringing spontaneous play. The question sitting most firmly is – recognising that as the challenge, what is within our power to work with? When we’re faced with things we ‘cannot change’, how do we work organisationally with the feedback emerging? How can we grow what is within our power?

**Mahllongonolo Sekhukhune: Knowledge management coordinator**

Has attended many MAREPs – her first regional was in Roodepoort. The positivity and passion around the work - there is a wealth of knowledge that needs to be engaged with in the right way. How do we put that in to action? Knowledge is wealth when applied.

**Vusi Lubisi. Regional Programme Leader, North West**

Looked at the regional as a platform created to enable round table discussions. The platform for colleagues to have an interaction was very valuable – bringing the curtain down was very useful, and people shared experiences deeply, and recognised commonalities and shared issues. At a regional level – as colleagues are we committed to learn and grow as individuals? Have we taken everyone on board? Some events could undo progress when not all are bought in?

**Elvis Choma: Area manager from North West**

Had been thinking about the ways in which we can make the organisational learning process work. If we do not carry the messages we’ve gathered in to our work spaces, then learning hasn’t occurred within ourselves. What innovative ideas do we have for facilitators who can emerge out of NRM? Between DDs and the regions is where most things are constrained. We need trained facilitators to assess the problems we’re sitting with in the regions. Managers are performance driven. Human interface issues are given less attention. We need people to support us in this regard.

**Farai Terai: WfWetlands, responsible for planning and M&E**

Has only been at programmatic and national MAREPs. Fostering continuous learning is embedded in his work. Project cycles and set up of the programme contain moments of learning. How do we distil all these learning opportunities and lessons and are there mechanisms for evaluating what is emerging from MAREPs?

**Linda Mabuza: Gauteng RPL**

Had a disciplinary meeting at the end of the meeting, which involved calling out behaviours that weren’t acceptable. This was also a useful learning opportunity.

**Mavis Moyo: Frees State RPL**

Out of these engagements, what do we think will prevent us from moving forward? Some of our PCs don’t have all the skill sets necessary – how do unpack programme objectives in a useful way so that
we all have a common vision, and understand that this is not just a job, because other people depend on you.

**Garth Barnes**

Fantastic to be here with this team. The Gauteng/North Wesst was his first regional, and he had been thinking about how to apply what he was hearing in a new way. The second question was around how – within our current resource constrained environment - do we do things smarter for maximum impact?

**Ahmed Khan: Director, Operational Support and Planning**

As a conscious mechanism, where are our existing structures not working where we should use this process to unlock it? It shouldn’t happen at arms’ length – we need to weave it back in to how we manage, and ensure it’s not an animal of itself, but fundamentally part of what we do. Everyone should understand how to make MAREPs work for you. Our management model should be what changes. The Gauteng event was fascinating.

**Collin Marthens: Operational Support and planning: Training and Development**

Disliked the first event in Stellenbosch, and the second made more sense, while being very technical. Do we achieve what we want to achieve through MAREPs, how do we ensure we implement outcomes. How do we ensure that what emerges goes down to all levels at NRMP? How do we go about getting different directorates within NRMP to work together better for our common goals?

**Christo Marais: Chief Director, NRM**

Christo noted that he hasn’t attended any regional MAREPs but has had only very good feedback from them – there hasn’t been any negative. However, the feedback comes at a certain hierarchical level, which is represented around the table.

A few questions included how to address situations where PCs and contractors feel threatened by the LUI – how do we shift that perception?

Another surrounded nrm practitioners approaching work as just being a job versus it being something meaningful. How do we work with that? Why do some do the bare minimum? Can we stimulate team members to be more committed and enthusiastic – specifically around project coordinators who don’t feel as if they’re contributing anything?

On being a sector leader – there is a need to get others to invest. Our private sector partners are critical. The LUI is here key.

On reskilling – we’re desperate to see them excited about things. We should start focusing on helping people learn new things.

What can we implement to get people excited? How can we shift from just ‘doing a job’.

MAREPs aren’t a training opportunity – they are about bringing a body of knowledge that is pre-ordained. The intention is to work with what people bring in to the experience.

How do we measure – 15 years down the line – that the series of interventions has worked? MAREP is one thing in a basket. We need to strive for various pockets of excellence. A little bit of excellence takes the programme into new spaces. How do we measure excellence?

The solution is ‘you’. There is a need to take individual responsibility.
On the question of resistance – its currently happening nationally. There is a feeling as if the LUI is an animal coming to eat everyone. People have said they weren’t prepared for the change. The actual problem is that we’ve created a dependency through direct contracting that isn’t competitive. We need to work on how we change the mindset of people towards being true SMMEs. Being threatened to being taken to EFF and other political parties – and a perception that we’re moving from poverty relief to benefitting white people. We need a plan to assist provinces with these issues that emerge.

**Session 2: Regional Leadership Panel**

The session opened with a short video of participants from the May 2018 reflecting on their engagement in the workshop.

Tanya then opened the panel discussion by inviting all present to listen deeply to the input around the regional MAREPs that we will now discuss. She encouraged all who attended the event to provide inputs, and noted that our intention with this process is to hold a conversation that deepens our understanding of what happened during the regional MAREP and what, if anything, has flowed out of them.

What happened for you at the regional MAREP/s and what are the key issues / threads that emerged for you?

3 key issues: the platform created for colleagues brought excitement – and the exercises that foster teamwork stood out. Colleagues appreciate each others’” effort when they get involved in the problem solving processes. Colleagues want to assist each other to resolve issues as a team.

The free interactions were very rich. There is a hunger for that kind of platform and opportunities to feel listened to and to interact.

The LUI was the big thread that emerged. There was a general feeling that the way it has been introduced and rolled out with colleagues at a lower level has not been explicit enough, and the lack of associated capacity building is an issue. The lack of information has created the perception that the LUI is a threat. Having the project management facet, like managing budgets, taken away, has been difficult.

The interactions between lower levels and higher levels is insufficient. Some feel that they are not recognised. Issues around awareness and capacity building arose. We used to have awareness raising mechanisms in place, but this has lapsed. Communication was another thing that came up. The manner in which we communicate messages among ourselves needs to be looked at. They are not always in sync, and this creates undesirable situations.

In terms of the planning – we didn’t really know what to expect. We did have a supportive team. People were not sure around how to prepare. The team gave assurance that they love what they do – positive thinking was apparent.

The activities brought a different awareness of how to think – which has been taken forward.

The LUI appointment should perhaps be based on provincial localities. LUIs coming from other provinces cause tension.

On monitoring training for LUIs – currently the LUIs cut cost through training that is not of a high quality. Are we giving our power over that to LUIs? This situation compromises the participants.
On community engagement – PCs need to be better equipped to engage with people with authority in communities so that they are not intimidated.

On ensuring proper office accommodation – there is a feeling that they are not adequately cared for and they just need to generate person days and hectares.

It came out strongly that environmental care extends beyond the jobs of individuals.

There were moments of fear within the session – such as when Sarah spoke about change. People want to know in what way we are shifting and evolving. People also want to know how MAREP will address the issues emerging.

It mattered to people that we are restoring landscape functionality, building resilient communities, giving contractors skills and increasing the quality of livelihoods.

While there were commonalities – especially around the positive things – some of the issues in the other region were quite different in nature. People were feeling deeply challenged by ad hoc crisis management and beaurocratic issues.

The role of project advisory committees was of concern, and there is a need to revisit that policy.

The communication and advocacy work came out strongly across both regions. If we are taking a more community engagement approach, staff needs more resources to perform an awareness raising and advocacy function

Issues around the demarcation of species currently listed, and the way they are being utilised in communities, came out as an issue. There needs to be an institutional approach to how we handle that.

Issues around the role of PCs arose, as did the issue of communal land and the different approach that asks of us.

Engaging with youth came out quite strongly.

There was a different between our opening round of the challenge to make people excited, and the feedback which highlighted the passion with which the regional engagement was characterised.

There is a question of whether people deeply grasp the content that they engage with in a way that enables this learning to change the way they work. It seems that when problems arise, they are elevated as opposed to the person closest to the issue engaging with problem solving. We need to learn how to own the information imparted to us.

It is possible to be demotivated through doing your work. How do we speak to that? The passion is there, but perhaps was dying, and the MAREP gave an opportunity to stimulate the passion and bring it back to life.

The way the engagement is framed makes a big difference to the type of energy it creates.

There was a health and safety training, and the MAREP, and the energy to impart information to the LUIs and contractors that was alive in the team was striking. There was a commitment out of the MAREP to engage more between regions, and that has been followed up on since. What is difficult now is that the team is not working because of the delays in contract implementation.

MAREP engagement reminded people of what was exciting when ‘we were younger’. There was a recognition that people are working with the same challenge no matter where we are based.
There is a need to embody the brand again. From advocacy materials to gear that is worn.

On PCs engaging with people very senior to them – this is an incredibly important skill. Needing to confront Chiefs or implementing entities – how do they engage without being bullish or being bullied? On feeling like they’re losing control that they had under direct contracting. We need to discuss the change of role and what that means. Administrative baggage may be less.

On training – we want to stimulate LUls to unlock resources for training. We can’t afford not to have good training. How do we ensure compliance while giving up some control?

Our job is to create an enabling environment. We’re not the boss. How do we convince PCs and area managers of this? Is there a need for a paradigm shift?

If you work with government money, we need to understand supply chain processes – better than those managing them.

Need to teach supply chain people about NRM processes and activities. Can we draw SCM into a process like this and into the field with PCs to bring some humanity to the issue?

Compliance and audit regulations are a reality.

North West did a substantial amount of prep work before the LUI was implemented – and every PC has been linked to an LUI from the beginning. Laying this groundwork has helped with bringing this change. There is also an internal induction programme that has been put together that is led by PCs. They are now in the process of assessing these initiatives. There is a need to find a way to package this work.

WfWet has, since 2003, worked with implementing agents. There may be a need to unpack their processes in order to learn from them. Some implementing agents are just glorified contractors. What are the LUls bringing to the party? You need to work with people with the capacity and tenacity to bring other resources on board. It took an engagement with Tswane metro over 10 years to have them bringing funds to the table. When he goes in to the field now landowners are prepared to contribute. However, the mechanisms are not clearly in place. How do we understand the receiving environment?

The LUI is clearly an area where a lot of learning and thinking needs to happen. Where is the space where this conversation needs to happen so that we can learn around this issue? Where is the focused conversation going to happen? There needs to be a technical platform for this.

It seems like there are very important issues coming out of the regional MAREPs. On the training – it brought awareness of learning around how we understand training to take place between ourselves. There needs to be wider engagement to ensure that everyone is on the same level / understanding on how this work is needing to be rolled out.

The whole notion around livelihood vs passion – is the motivation for this community about passion for the environment or is it just about livelihood? In many cases it’s about livelihood. The greatest gift we –as nrm practitioners - can give to the environment is to create a passionate society. Just creating a platform for people to be heard and share experiences – it creates a recognition that people need. It allows people to feel valued. Sharing your problems is therapeutic – finding consolation in numbers – then as a collective, how do we solve our problems?

On the issue around change management – it speaks to our ability to manage change quite clearly. We need to think more about this. Our LUls problems are confounded by delays in signing contracts.
Year after year we have had similar issues, and always say there is another thing that delays this. We need to interrogate these processes and see what we can do.

The relationship of advocacy to LUIs is nuanced. We need to strengthen the process that advocacy ran 18 months ago. Issues around stakeholder engagement, the need for cultural sensitivity, for branding and presentation.

Creating a space to share ones’ humanity is important. The exercise around listening deeply and understanding each other as people is so important. We don’t listen to each other enough – through empathic and generative lenses. This links in to the importance of trust. Where there is trust, there is speed in being able to work faster with each other.

Engagement with youth was another strong issue – perhaps we should look at this from a participant perspective. The simulation tool being developed by Jules to create learning spaces around nrm is also of note.

There are so many opportunities nested within the problems that are emerging. Where do they sit? Internally or externally?

There was a request for a circular around the shift in contracting models. We need timeframes for this, otherwise we aren’t going anywhere.

What’s the real difference between an LUI and an implementing entity?

**Session 3**

Tanya introduced an activity aimed at changing how ingrained thinking habits direct our thinking. Allan reminded the group how listening is required in order to start to approach advocacy, and how, similarly, sometimes working into complex questions asks counterintuitive processes of groups.

The exercise involved a set of 16 leaves in an envelope that needed to be ordered. The group was asked to get in to pairs and arrange the leaves in the order that they were produced by the tree.

After the pairs had completed their arrangement, the group returned to plenary where the process was explained. A question raised was whether there were 16 leaves or one leaf in sequence over time. What is revealed is not just 16 things, but a process that speaks to what happens between the leaves. The process is only made visible because you can see the moment. What does the logic of the sequence look like? The boundaries we create sometimes preclude the linkages inherent.

Movement holds everything together.

There is a process that NRM is living. It has a past and a future, and it has a moment now. What’s the logic of the organisation that produces the ‘leaf’ that NRM currently is. What, centrally, if you look at all the questions / issues / problems that arose this morning – can we look through them to speak to what NRM is as a whole?

With everything that we’ve heard this morning – what’s the logic of the organisation, or what’s the central issue for NRM as an organisation that threads together everything that we’ve heard this morning? What’s the essence of what’s at stake for NRM out of what we’ve heard? What’s at play in the organisation? We’re looking for a synthesis out of what we’ve been hearing.

On SMME’s – the socio-political priorities that drive the need to be relevant, and creating a reliable repeatable livelihood. The private sector struggle to engage with government because they have different drivers. The private sector is often more efficient than government. An implementing entity
gets its full suite of funding from government. For an LUI project, government is one of the clients. In the NRM model the implementing entity is a subset under LUIs. Some of our lowest person day costs are from communal areas in Limpopo.

There is strong criticism in the wetland community around the job creation driver within NRM. Environmental outcomes is the vehicle, the petrol is the fuel. Ecosystem conservation creates ecosystem services. The WfW programme brought people in to environmental programmes. This is what keeps the programme together. That conservation drive is the passion that brings us together. The development agenda is what informs our agenda. There is power involved [PACs are a good example], thus there are power plays that emerge, which takes the form of a struggle over resources. The dependencies have created tension. We need to figure out other types of fuel. Need to modify the engine.

Is our administrative process sufficient for our requirements?

Whatever you choose, make sure it is relevant. Our value to society is at stake. We need a society that has internalised the value of nature, and recognised the jobs that have been created. We need to be able to convince society to invest. We need to broaden our definition of investment. Social capital and ecological capital. Making the value offering relevant. We need to talk about how we are telling our story. People need to be saying that clearing aliens is a core part of activities for water provision in Cape Town.

How can we make our lives easier? How can we create an enabling environment?

There were protests in Patensie because NRM wasn’t open for business for 3 months. This is about the capacity for human beings to drive a programme of work.

There is something broken in the engine – what is the cause and the risk? We are located in an organisational culture where committed, passionate people are in a battle with a system which leads to illness and frustration. We respond in a crisis mode without pausing to think because there is immense pressure to do so. In us wanting to respond and be relevant, there is something that is a bit dysfunctional and disabling

We should question our institutional arrangements. It’s not a matter of criticising DEA. There is something to question about the ease of doing business. Our institutional, administrative and legal arrangements need to be optimal.

Even in a different institutional arrangement, we take ourselves with us. We need to look at that in us. It is both people and processes.

The threat is that we are not able to achieve our targets, and that would mean not being able to contribute to the department.

Around the institutional arrangements – what is the logic of the organisation? The brokenness within the organisation creates the symptoms that we see. The currents – such as visioning and proper strategic planning and communication were discussed. Deep staff moral and what could erode it, such as lack of resources, were at issue. There seems to be a shortage of entrusting relationships, such as delegation of responsibility. Lastly, the economics of our country drives some of the unhappiness around livelihoods.

There are two elements to our vision – the ecosystem impact and resilience, and the livelihood aspect. We need to knit these two together more effective, and take a central cabal of people
through this. Before we get to institutional rejigging, we need to know what our lifeblood is. What is it of our current arrangements that’s not working?

If our lifeblood is around the people, what are we doing for those people to enable them to drive this?

There is a fundamental need to engage in some introspection as a programme. We need to question business as usual. If we don’t keep up with the times, we become irrelevant. The world has changed, and our systems are not robust enough to assimilate the change. We’re struggling with the data, getting contracts signed, selling our product, audit processes, and yet we are growing. We need to stop and take stock, and see how much value we can get by doing a deep introspection to see how best we can get benefit out of what we do. This will help us to realign ourselves to the current changing world, and to develop a smarter system. We, as this group, have a role to play in reshaping this world.

It’s so difficult to try to change this ship. It’s difficult to change your ways, and to bring shifts to entrenched patterns.

There is an issue with resources, and how NRM is resourced.

The situation we’re trying to deal with is becoming more difficult and more intractable.

The complexity of the situations that PCs find themselves in when they try to do their work was very clear. The job is a highly complex community development role. They deal with a wide spectrum of stakeholders and issues. The PC needs to negotiate through this and change it in order to change the land – and the responsiveness and intelligence and sophisticated capacities required to do this is not necessarily seen by the system. There need to be a different way of thinking about this, what the work is, and what is required to manage and resource it. These people need to come together to learn about how to do this because you learn this capacity as you do it.

If we don’t address this cluster of issues, and address the challenges of this level of the organisation, then we will not be dealing with the environmental outcomes. It asks listening, change management, developing understanding and shifting perspectives, etc. changing cultural norms is a huge job. It requires a supple organisation to respond to this.

How does the system work with this?

How do you measure and support that role? It’s at SES, stakeholder engagement and the soft, intangible and unmeasurable stuff that we make or break our deliverables. These foundational areas are being wrestled with internationally and here.

We have been trained as conservationists and environmental scientists. Many in the organisation want to become scientists. Perhaps we are at a tipping point – because our organisation is not steeped in social science / community development type people. Compliance is putting so much pressure on everyone that the conservation outcomes get obscured. All these issues are far removed from where they come from. What do we want the job to look like, and who decides this?

We need to escalate this reskilling process somehow.

The work that PCs and Area Managers are truly cross functional. There are a suite of functions, such as H&S, risk, advocacy, environmental management, etc. Allan is speaking about community development. From where we are sitting, its nature conservation and environmental management.
There is not a lot of emphasis on community development. If this is the type of work they need to do, what does this ask of reskilling?

Sanet gave an update on the reskilling process – centred around PCs and Area Managers, which started 2 years ago. The respective roles needed to be clarified. Mentoring was noted as important for LUIs, which PCs need to do. A skills audit will soon be underway. There will be a redesign of the functions for PCs and Area Managers, and job evaluations will be conducted. The change management process was noted as an important component of this. Project planning, contract management, advocacy and liaison are all involved in this rejigging.

25 IEs, 4 AM, 1 PC in Western Cape. Worked mostly through IEs for the past 10 years.

The issue of having less contracts and the assumption that this means smaller workload was raised.

There is a larger debate and openness to overarching goals, so we mustn’t paint ourselves into a corner with the reskilling process.

There is an origin related story that we still need to get right. What does this mean for what we do and how we do it? What does this mean for how we are together as an organisation?

How has our identity evolved over time?

Day 2

**Session 3:**
A reflection on yesterday:

The morning moved through an intense process reflecting on how the champions group came to be, and then into what the regional MAREP has been surfacing. We then moved into a phase of discussing what is happening in the broad organisation, and what is sitting underneath those issues. We explored the tension between the drive and passion apparent in the organisation, and what is asked of people – in what, to some extent, is a dysfunctional institutional culture, where what is asked is often above and beyond what people are capable of delivering.

We moved into the clear need to have engagement around some of those issues – but in a different way to the manner in which this is usually dealt with in the organisation. How do we engage in these issues differently, and is predicated on listening and reflecting.

This led us into the questions posed at the end of the day around our origin story, and the tension between the environmental/nature conservation drivers, and the social, citizenship building imperative, and the way in which we do need both, but in what modality?

In that origin related story, what is it we need to do now, to do justice to this?

Now, we will take half an hour to reflect individually on three questions:

1. What does everything I’ve heard and experienced mean for me?
2. How am I feeling about where I find myself in NRM?
3. What, if anything, shifted for me yesterday?
We then reconvened and requested that all participants get in to pairs and discuss their reflections during their walk. They were asked the give each other time to fully share before entering in to a conversation.

**Exercise 4**

**Reflections:**

DEA NRM is not keeping up with times, NRM’s evolutionary pace is quite slow. What are NRM’s constraints towards innovation? Problems and challenges are identified but solutions are not innovative.

NRM needs to adapt, for example Climate Change affects many countries and new strategies are developed to adapt to new climate change realities. NRM moved from Water Affairs to DEA, but there was no proper plan to adapt to the new setting. There are unresolved issues inherited from DWA.

NRM processes connect with critical realism: What is seen in the landscape has deeper processes that drive it, what is changed in the landscape is the symptom not the cause. NRM deals with symptoms not deep root causes. NRM must work on what is invisible. Change is happening but not the desired change. Many changes happen at higher level, not at ground level.

There is an understanding of what is not working, sometimes we live with what we don’t like.

What we are avoiding and scared to reveal is going to explode.

With everything I have heard, I feel empowered compared to where we come from. We used to talk about hectares and there was no platform to reflect. We sometimes tick boxes and hardly take strategic views. Have we ever thought about late signed contracts? Regarding EI investments, are we empowered at lower level to engage with relevant stakeholders? Having the Chief Director coming to listen and share his views shows that we are listened to and now he is aware of what is happening.

I listened to a wealth of knowledge from this group, but what do we do with those ideas? DEA doesn’t have a good succession plan. “If you train a person, he must be better than you in the future. If he is not, then you failed. In terms of change, LNRG is an agent of change, the purpose of LNCG is to share and pass on what will develop others”.

Being in an organisation blinds you, you hardly take yourself out and observe from far. The purpose of this forum is to establish a small forum to share and not wait for the principals to gather us for further conversation.

We need a bigger boat. The problems we face are quite big and we deal with lies and complications. Once you know the size of the issue, you know the solution. Sometimes we know what is happening and what the problems are, sometimes we don’t. We need to reconfigure the way we work. NRM officials bring different interests. A lot of money has been spent on MAREPs, the value now is obvious, sometimes we gain nothing from some of the other meetings.

If we were NRM participants who are currently jobless, would we have survived without salaries? If change has a negative impact on participants, it is not a desirable change.

I love the conversation, we have dropped into a place of listening to one another, there is a quality of being together now. Quality: it is interesting to think about what are the enabling factors that drive the conversation. Change is happening all the time, the question is: *What is generating that*
change? Is it a change that we are recognising, once you have understood the problem, you generate the solution, but we need to understand the magnitude before we tackle the root cause. We must ask ourselves what are the underlying issues behind the problems. This can become the seed for transformation in NRM.

Trying to connect the dots, the structure restricts the way we do things. How do we begin to exert the change in the structure, where is that power to change the system? It starts with awareness. We do see the problems; individually, how do we bring our role to influence the process? Coming together creates a platform to solve the problems.

Having heard all issues, but when I go back to my desk, I will be confronted with the same issues. A first step to solving a problem is to realise that power lies within your head.

I am loving the conversation, the origin story or current identity story. If leadership doesn’t resolve the boat needed, how can they expect other people to resolve them? If leadership doesn’t join this group, it is not going to resolve the challenges.

Reflect on ‘the agent of change’ session. What does it means to be an agent of change?

We need to be patient with the process, it has taken a while to talk about the change. Talking about the change is a long process, I would urge everyone to be patient with the process, and we need to share this amongst ourselves. Enriching a learning process is like building infrastructure that will help in the future. Conversation must be created in different layers. Together we can make it work, we gathered for a purpose and have a role to play.

We must be equipped with knowledge of where we want to go as NRM, there is a risk in hurrying the process and acting prematurely. You don’t scratch where it doesn’t itch, we need to respond where things are not working well. It is difficult to engineer an institution to give you results, change resource allocation and invest in a change of mind set.

There are long, medium and shot term goals. Relationships, communications and partnerships are important. In the medium term, it is possible to make everything happen. We need to build on shoulders of giants instead of building a new giant.

We have a choice to make, make a car or plane. To be an agent of change, one needs a clear message to communicate and distribute. Change takes time, there is a difference between the needed change and wanted change.

What do we mean by change? Why? Are we on the same page about the change? What is required from us to effect the change? Are we equipped to effect the change? We must be prepared to do so. We should be not be too patient about the process, an action must be taken.

Sometimes these problem are like the knots, you pull one in thinking that you are solving it, only to find out that you are complicating it. As agents of change, how do we know where to move? Our journey should be directed to somewhere elsewhere. To effect a change you have to be brave.

This process has brought value and we should take ownership and growth with it. However, at an institutional level there are different divisions, therefore it should be unpacked it independently. It is important to be flexible to let people grow.

Piet-Luis: People are passionate about conservation, people get frustrated with bureaucracy and SCM, -with the desire they have to go extra mile. We are doing conservation but there is no single
common message, no learning. We have a communication gap. It takes time to get the message through. We have a disjuncture in messaging.

Vision is a common denominator, we need to understand each one’s role.

There is a need to rephrase the vision and for leadership to write it down does not directly translate it into reality. We need a wider representation in the group, and at a higher level.

**Exercise 5**

*The final exercise posed the question: What are you leaving here with?*

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**Closing**

Sarah: This is a slow process, but it’s something wherein you can see where this is going. It is exciting for me and I’m grateful. I have listened carefully and I will take this forward with Christo and there are different tangible steps to take forward.
Annexure 1

Day 1  Overall reflections

It was a tricky day in terms of where to pitch the work we engaged in, and how we’re connecting what we think is important to this group. Our intention was not necessarily meeting what’s in the group. Keeping the energy levels up was difficult. It lacked a certain vital force. Uncertainty on whether we were on the right track. No space for facilitator’s reflection. Energetic misjudgement in full circle all morning. The modality we shifted in to was needed, and is what this group needs to be doing. There was an element of fragmentation until Allan’s input.

The strong feeling of how potentially essential this group is, and how we are really at its infancy. There is a wider call for pausing and reflection that was apparent in this room. There are multiple leverage points for the shift we’re looking in to.

Worry about why Dudu, Tapiwa, Brendan, Innocent aren’t here. What was more important, or what was here that needed to be shunted. It has brought up the question again of whether there is a group here. What holds? There is not yet an anchor for this group.

It’s difficult to conceptualise in to this organisational culture. You never know who will be in the room from one day to the next. That’s an organisational reality – unless there is a way to shift that.

Seems like an organisation in an identity crisis. One foot in each space.

Is there a fundamental and intrinsic mandate for this group that connects one session to another?

Is there a belief that this learning process will shift anything?

Capacity development and what roles are / society that has internalised the value of nature [advocacy] / LUI and equity

Do we continue to do regional MAREPs? How do we support people in between them?

Day 2  Observers’ feedback

This space is valued and appreciated for the quality of the conversation to understand the tough issues that are confronting the organisation. Some people see the organisation as stuck, but change is happening. We are looking for a relationship. We need to be equipped to do this, capacity development is required to do this. This a process that must engage the senior management to drive this process. How do we communicate what is happening at LNCG to senior management to allow themselves to see them as champions? For me, it has been profound to feel the change in this group. There is a positive experience and there is an opportunity that is alive.

The question of change has become central, if we want to be the agents of change, we need reflections and observations. Without senior management participating in LNCG, it is going to be difficult to make impact. A vision only becomes alive when you have participated in the vision making.

The word change: what can we do to effect change? How can we help the organisation to be a learning organisation? To not go away thinking we are agents of change, but go away as people who are leading learning. How does this group become connected to the regional MAREP? Are there any other learning conversations that should be taking place? Where do the proceedings of this group end up? Can we turn it into a learning devise? The intention of LNCG must stimulate new ways of learning.

Through learning we do different changes. We must focus on our own intervention. The importance of the SES MAREP in regions is clear. How do we create supportive space with integrity for those who are in need? I am seeing what is required from me to make this work. As DEA we can hold this on our own, I am excited about the results of this group.
Annexure 2: Pictures