Mid North Forests
Future Management Options
REQUEST FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST
INFORMATION
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The opportunity
Through the Government of South Australia’s (“Government”) consultation and community engagement, it is clear the Mid North Forests and surrounding region provide a unique location to develop and progress socio-economic opportunities. These include, but are not limited to:
• commercial softwood plantation management;
• alternative forest management and use of wood resources and other assets;
• sport and recreation;
• tourism, including nature-based tourism;
• agricultural pursuits, such as horticulture, cropping and livestock;
• rural living;
• nature conservation;
• community and public uses.

Purpose
Proposals received from the Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI) process will assist the Government determine a way forward for the Mid North Forests. The REOI process will assist in identifying potential future uses and users of the land, will enable early recognition of interested parties and will inform potential future phases of the Government’s deliberations.

While offers to purchase land will be received and considered, the primary purpose of this REOI is to elicit proposals for the future use and development of the land – which may, in due course, entail either purchase or lease, as appropriate.

The property
The Wirrabara, Bundaleer, Yarcowie and Leighton Forest Reserves are collectively referred to in this document as the Mid North Forests. They have been in operation as commercial forest and recreation areas for many decades. As a result of recent fires, proposals for alternative future management are being explored.
The location
- Wirrabara Forest Reserve is located 8km west of Wirrabara township;
- Bundaleer Forest Reserve is located 10km south of Jamestown;
- Yarcowie Forest Reserve is located approximately 30km east of Jamestown; and
- Leighton Forest Reserve is located approximately 16km west of Burra.

The site
Wirrabara, Bundaleer, Yarcowie and Leighton Forest Reserves comprise a gross area of approximately 10,234 hectares of Crown Title Reserves.

- Wirrabara Forest Reserve 7,037 hectares
- Bundaleer Forest Reserve 3,123 hectares
- Yarcowie Forest Reserve 36 hectares
- Leighton Forest Reserve 38 hectares

The South Australian Forestry Corporation (ForestrySA) also manages 83 hectares of SA Water Crown Title land at Wirrabara.

Improvements
The Mid North Forests contain extensive improvements including: standing softwood and hardwood plantations; vehicle roads and tracks; office and sheds; functioning bores; electricity connections; and visitor facilities including trails, camping and picnic sites. Further details available from supporting documents.

Current zoning
ForestrySA-managed areas in the Mid North span three local government areas:

- Wirrabara Forest Reserve is within the Landscape Protection Zone of the DC Mount Remarkable Development Plan.
- Bundaleer Forest Reserve is within the Primary Production Zone, Forestry Policy Area 1 of the Northern Areas Council Development Plan.
- Yarcowie and Leighton Forest Reserves are within the Primary Production Zone of the Goyder Council Development Plan.

Closing date
This Expression of Interest closes on 28 August, 2015
1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Government is undertaking the Mid North Forests Future Strategy ("Strategy") to pursue economic, social and environmental benefits for the region. It consists of a number of steps including:

- Engaging with stakeholders;
- Considering ForestrySA’s future role;
- Gathering and evaluating information;
- Testing the market for proposals.

The Government is issuing this REOI to seek proposals for potential development or uses of, or land management arrangements for, the Mid North Forests.

The Government has undertaken extensive consultation with the local community and other stakeholders. This consultation has provided useful information to guide and inform this process, and identified a number of opportunities for the potential future of the Mid North Forests and surrounding areas, as set out in Section 4 of this document.

The nature, scale and location of the Mid North Forests offer potential for a range of uses, which could be undertaken in multiple transactions, with one or more parties, now and in the future.

The Mid North Forests are areas of rich environmental, cultural, heritage and community value. An important consideration for the Government will be the extent to which any proposed option utilises and enhances these values, with particular regard for the potential impacts to the local community and broader regional development.

The Government will consider the extent to which an option can strengthen the regional economy through creating jobs, diversifying employment opportunities, and ensuring rural centres adjacent to the forests thrive into the future.

The criteria for considering expressions of interest are detailed in Section 6.

This document provides a high level overview of key aspects of the Mid North Forests, a guide to the significant amount of information that has been compiled and the opportunities that have been identified, and to seek expressions of interest for potential development or uses of, or land management arrangements for the Mid North Forests.

Expressions of Interest must be lodged as detailed in Section 6.1 Responding to this REOI.

Other documents supporting the REOI:

- Terms of Request for Expressions of Interest
- Expanded Site Description
- Expression of Interest lodgement form

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Primary Industries and Regions, SA
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2.0 THE MID NORTH FORESTS

2.1 Broad description
The Government created the Wirrabara and Bundaleer Forest Reserves in 1876 and plantations were established from this date. Since then these areas have provided a range of economic, environmental and social benefits to the local regions. The smaller Yarcowie and Leighton Forest Reserves were established in 1911 and 1909 respectively.

ForestrySA currently manages the Mid North Forests commercial timber production as well as public use for recreation, heritage protection and environmental conservation.

The area is valued for tourism and as a gateway to the Flinders Ranges. Its natural and cultural heritage features attract many visitors. The local communities identify strongly with Wirrabara and Bundaleer Forest Reserves and have valued the social and economic benefits provided since their establishment. As a unique natural asset, the area is also valued for its contribution to conservation, aesthetics, carbon sequestration and wildlife habitat.

2.2 Plantations
Wirrabara Forest Reserve includes 2,184 hectares of plantation and Bundaleer Forest Reserve 1,717 hectares of predominantly pine and eucalypt species. Fires in 2012 and 2014 at Wirrabara Forest Reserve burnt over 80% of the plantation area. A fire in 2013 at Bundaleer Forest Reserve also damaged large areas of plantation.

Yarcowie and Leighton Forest Reserves mainly comprise Eucalypt plantations with Eucalyptus cladocalyx (Sugar Gum) the predominant species grown.

Some of the plantations are subject to existing and proposed agreements primarily for timber harvesting. These include the majority of the remaining standing radiata pine plantation timber. These arrangements and other existing interests and restraints are further detailed in Section 5.

Wirrabara and Bundaleer Forest Reserves also contain various pine and eucalypt species trials some of which were burned in the 2014 fire. The Bundaleer Farm Forestry Demonstration Area includes progeny and genetic gains trial sites established in collaboration with the Australian Low Rainfall Tree Improvement Group, seed production areas and Farm Forestry Demonstration Sites. ForestrySA also has a site preparation comparison trial along with an annual growth plot program to monitor growth rates of young age plantations.
2.3 Replanted area
Since the 2013 and 2014 fires, 143 hectares of Pinus radiata has been replanted at Bundaleer. Another 150 hectares may be planted in 2015 subject to favourable weather conditions. No planting has occurred or is currently planned for Wirrabara.

2.4 Conservation areas
The Wirrabara Forest Reserve contains areas of natural features proclaimed as Native Forest Reserves and is located in an area of high conservation value and interest, with access to the declared conservation areas of Telowie Gorge Conservation Park and Mount Remarkable National Park. Further information on these conservation areas is available at: www.environment.sa.gov.au/parks

2.5 Cultural heritage
The Mid North region contains the traditional lands of both the Nukunu and Njadjuri peoples. Sites of significance may exist within the Mid North Forests.

Australia’s first commercial forest plantings were made at Bundaleer in 1876 and soon after at Wirrabara. This was in response to the lack of natural forest resources in South Australia and the rate they were diminishing. These plantings were to investigate timber producing trees from Europe, North America and Australia suitable for local conditions. The Mid North Forests contain many examples of plantations dating from these times.

The Mid North Forests also contain many examples of built European cultural heritage mostly associated with the development of the Mid North Forests. These include:

WIRRABARA FOREST RESERVE:
• Forester’s house
• Stables
• Old Wirrabara Nursery
• Sawmill site
• Charcoal pits
• Woods Well sawpit
• Wirrabara Forest Cemetery
• Gebhardt’s house

BUNDALEER FOREST RESERVE:
• Old Nursery site*
• Conservator’s Hut*
• Former forest office*

*Included on the South Australian Heritage Register
3.0 PURPOSE AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

3.1 Why this Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI)?

As part of the first step of the Strategy, the Government has sought views and feedback from the community regarding their values, concerns and identified opportunities for the Mid North Forests and surrounding areas.

The Government has been meeting with the community to consider the future options for the Mid North Forests, as well as working through a multi-agency steering committee on matters ranging from economics and employment to environment and engagement with key regional organisations.

One of the matters being considered is the potential for diversifying future land uses of the Mid North Forests to strengthen the regional economy.

This REOI seeks to test the market for future use options, including to:

- identify viable options for the use of the land;
- identify parties interested in pursuing the opportunities available;
- inform the Government as to what may be involved in any future use, such as:
  - the associated development economics and indicative timelines;
  - the sale or lease of any interests in land;
  - the area of land involved, and how this may impact on other potential uses of the land;
  - the infrastructure required.

3.2 Desired outcomes

The Government is seeking expressions of interest involving some or all of the following elements, being projects that:

- are commercially viable;
- utilise and enhance the rich environmental, cultural, heritage and community values associated with the Mid North Forests;
- have positive impacts on regional development, including by fostering a diverse economy, sustainable jobs, and ensuring regions thrive;
- ensure value for money is achieved for the Government;
- propose sustainable non-commercial uses, including for sporting, recreational, public or community uses.
Through the consultation and community engagement process, a number of opportunities have been identified for the potential future use of the Mid North Forests, as set out in this section. The Government remains open, however, to any other potential uses that interested parties may propose.

4.1 Commercial softwood plantation management

There is opportunity for investment in continuing and/or extending commercial softwood plantation management in some or all of the Mid North Forests with consideration of existing agreements. The Mid North Forests have:

- large areas of mature and recently established Pinus radiata plantations;
- established forestry contractors and processing facilities in the region;
- a 140 year operational history of commercial softwood timber production; and
- status in current development and zoning documents.

A description of the plantation resource is outlined in Section 2 and in the Expanded Site Description document.

4.2 Alternative forest management

Opportunities for alternative forest management include:

- new management arrangements, including partnerships, joint ventures, and leasing;
- utilising the hardwood plantations of the Mid North Forests including for the development of high value furniture and craft products;
- establishing alternative forest or vegetation species including for sandalwood or honey production;
- establishing carbon plantings; or
- establishing and/or managing plantations for firewood production.

4.3 Sport and recreation

Investment opportunities exist to commercially manage many of the sport and recreation activities currently undertaken within the Mid North Forests. There is also opportunity to build new business by developing additional facilities and services such as walking trails, mountain bike riding trails and 4WD tracks. Just some of the opportunities that exist for the future development of sport and recreation in the region include:

- improving and expanding the current trails network for walking and mountain biking to provide for a greater variety of users, abilities and experiences;
- providing additional and improved camping and accommodation opportunities to support mountain bike and walking trails;
- expanding and improving horse-riding trails and facilities; and

- considering further opportunities for 4WD and off road motorcycling experiences.

Existing sporting and recreational facilities within the Mid North Forests include:

**Recreation Trails**

- Both Wirrabara and Bundaleer Forest Reserves have a diverse range of trails suitable for walking, cycling and horseriding. Many of these are marked and lead visitors to sites of interest.

- The Heysen Trail is South Australia’s premier long distance walking trail extending some 1,200 kilometres from the Fleurieu Peninsula to the Northern Flinders Ranges. It passes through both Wirrabara and Bundaleer Forest Reserves with details included on visitor maps. It is managed by the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources.

- The Mawson Trail is a long distance cycling trail extending more than 900 kilometres from Adelaide to Blinman in the Flinders Ranges. When fully operational, it passes through both Wirrabara and Bundaleer Forest Reserves with details included on visitor maps. It is managed by the Office for Recreation and Sport.

**Camping, accommodation and picnic grounds**

- Wirrabara and Bundaleer Forest Reserves contain many opportunities for visitor accommodation and picnics. Camping and accommodation is currently managed by ForestrySA from the Wirrabara Forest Headquarters.

- Wirrabara Forest Reserve includes the Ippinitchie Campground, Wirrabara Forest Picnic Ground and the Old Sawmill Picnic Ground. These can be accessed from Forest Road and by recreational trails passing through the forest. The Wirrabara YHA is located near the Ippinitchie Campground on Forest Road.

- Bundaleer Forest Reserve offers camping and accommodation at Curnow’s Hut, Conservator’s Hut, and the Old Forestry Office. The Bundaleer Picnic Ground is an attractive location used by many including the Bundaleer Festival first held in 1999.

**Sporting and associated facilities**

- Recreation and sports facilities at Bundaleer Forest Reserve include a cricket oval, tennis courts, toilet block, shelters and seating managed by the Bundaleer Recreation and Sports Association under a lease arrangement with ForestrySA.

Further information is available on the respective visitor brochures for each forest, available on the ForestrySA website www.forestry.sa.gov.au/Recreation/Bundaleer-Wirrabara
4.4 Tourism, including Nature-based Tourism

The Bundaleer and Wirrabara Forests lie within the Southern Flinders Ranges, a region known for its beautiful landscapes, historic country towns, walking and cycling trails (including the Heysen and Mawson Trails – see previous section), national/conservation parks and local food and wine.

The Southern Flinders Ranges is part of the Flinders Ranges and Outback Tourism Region.

In the year ending December 2014, the Flinders Ranges and Outback tourism region attracted an estimated 477,000 domestic overnight visitors, who stayed about 2.4 million nights in the region. This amounts to 15 per cent of visits and 19 per cent of nights to Regional SA. Domestic overnight expenditure in the region was around $230 million for the year ending December 2014, with roughly another $100 million from domestic day visits.

There were approximately 36,000 international overnight visitors to the Flinders Ranges and Outback in the last year to September 2014, staying 214,000 nights. International visitors account for 7 per cent of the visits and 8 per cent of visitor nights to the Flinders Ranges and Outback, with more than 80 per cent visiting the area for holiday or pleasure. Nineteen per cent of the region’s international visitors were on a working holiday visa.

Domestic same day visitation in the Flinders Ranges and Outback accounts for a further 600,000 visits within the Flinders Ranges and Outback, many would be residents within the region.

Regional tourism profiles, including for the Flinders Ranges and Outback are located at the South Australian Tourism corporate website at http://www.tourism.sa.gov.au/regional-tourism-profiles.aspx


General visitor information on the Flinders Ranges and Outback Tourism Region, including the Visitor Guide is located at http://www.southaustralia.com/regions/flinders-ranges-outback.aspx

4.5 Agriculture

The Mid North Forests are located within a region of high agricultural productivity primarily associated with cereal crops, such as wheat and barley, as well as sheep grazing for merino wool. Beef cattle, piggeries, chicken farms and horticulture also play a part in the economic structure of the region.

Maps that outline the potential for agriculture in the region can be found at the PIRSA website: www.pir.sa.gov.au/forestry/mid_north_forests_future_strategy

While offers to purchase land will be received and considered, the primary purpose of this REOI is to elicit proposals for the future use and development of the land – which may, in due course, entail either purchase or lease, as appropriate.
4.6 Rural living

The Development Plan Amendment process allows Local Government to create Rural Living Zones within their jurisdictions. Developments within this zone will be appropriately sited to harmonise with the environment and produce attractive, well-designed built form complementary to the prevailing features of the area. The Rural Living Zone provides an important buffer between the Primary Production Zone and Urban Zones in order to retain the semi-rural character of the landscape.

4.7 Nature conservation

Vegetation associations of conservation significance in the Mid North Forests include grey box grassy woodland and peppermint box woodland, amongst many other key natural assets for the region.

Opportunities for nature conservation outcomes exist through the retention of Native Forest Reserves within a formal conservation system, the addition of further areas of native vegetation to a formal conservation system, or the private acquisition of natural areas for the purpose of conservation.

Nature conservation outcomes could also be achieved through strategic revegetation of areas not currently under native vegetation, particularly where this would result in consolidation of existing natural vegetation within plantation areas, or act to buffer existing parks and reserves.

4.8 Community and public uses

The Government’s consideration of potential development, uses of, or land management arrangements for the Mid North Forests, also provides an opportunity to consider a range of possibilities for deriving community and public use benefits.

Outcomes could include the transfer or lease of some lands to community groups, Local Government or State Government agencies. Uses could include sport and recreation, arts, health, community forestry, environmental conservation, heritage protection or other areas of interest to the regional community.

Opportunities in this area could be determined by identified community or environmental needs, and may go beyond the passive provision of access.
5.0 POLICY, EXISTING INTERESTS AND CONSTRAINTS

5.1 General
Respondents should be aware of the policies, the existing interests in the land, and the restraints described in this section.

Under the Forestry Act 1950, the Governor of South Australia has the power to proclaim a forest reserve, or vary or revoke a proclamation of a forest reserve. The Mid North Forests are currently proclaimed as forest reserves.

5.2 Strategic context
This REOI will be part of the process of shaping the best and most suitable approach in each instance – which will be according to the Government’s regional development objectives and appropriate environmental and economic objectives, as articulated in various Government of South Australia plans and strategies.

The site is recognised in, or affected by, a range of Government plans and strategies. Most notable are:

- The Strategic Infrastructure Plan for South Australia (2005) and the Regional Overview for the Mid North and Yorke Peninsula developed as part of the 2010 Discussion Paper for the review of the infrastructure plan. More information is available at www.infrastructure.sa.gov.au/
- Northern and Yorke Regional NRM Plan (2008), Volume B: Strategic Plan 2009-2018
- Mid North Region Plan (March 2011), which recognises the historical, commercial and tourism value of the forests, highlights Wirrabara township as a centre for nature-based tourism, and notes the emerging wine industry in the Southern Flinders area.
- Both of the main Local Government areas (Northern Areas Council and The District Council of Mount Remarkable) have strategic plans and planning schemes that include objectives for increased tourism, heritage and environmental protection, volunteer support and improved recreational opportunities.
- The Living Flinders Project, a collaboration between local landholders, non-government and government organisations, Living Flinders is an important part of the Government’s Flinders-Olary NatureLinks and the Trans-Australia Eco-Link.

5.3 Harvesting agreements
ForestrySA has a commercial agreement with Morgan Sawmill Jamestown (MSJ) regarding preservation log supply from first thinning operations.

Discussions are occurring regarding a contract to harvest some standing radiata pine plantation timber in the Mid North Region (excluding those areas subject to replanting as described in Section 2.3). The proposed standing sale contract would see the remaining land returned progressively after each area is clear felled and the sites cleared of harvesting residue.
5.4 Existing licence arrangements

A range of licences, leases, easements and agreements currently apply to the Mid North Forest Reserves. Further information is provided in Expanded Site Description document.

- Grazing licences
- Beekeeping licences
- Access easements and arrangements
- Electricity easements
- Communications tower licences
- Community use lease

5.5 Development plan settings

The Mid North Forests span three local government areas – Northern Areas Council, District Council of Mount Remarkable, and the Regional Council of Goyder.

Wirrabara Forest Reserve is within the Landscape Protection Zone of the DC Mount Remarkable Development Plan. Bundaleer Forest Reserve is within the Primary Production Zone, Forestry Policy Area 1 of the Northern Areas Council Development Plan. Yarcowie and Leighton Forest Reserves are within the Primary Production Zone of the Goyder Council Development Plan.

It is anticipated that an outcome of the Strategy may be a re-zoning of a portion of the land away from current policy settings, but it is yet to be determined what the new zoning(s) might be. Indeed, the nature of any re-zoning may well be influenced by the outcome of this REOI.

5.6 Native vegetation and conservation areas

The Mid North Forests contain large areas of diverse and significant native vegetation which is not used for commercial forestry. Three areas have been proclaimed as Native Forest Reserve under the Forestry Act 1950. These are the King Tree, Spaniards Gully and Wirrabara Range Native Forest Reserves. Detailed information on these can be found in the Resource Document available at ForestrySA’s website www.forestry.sa.gov.au/Conservation/Native-Forest-Reserves.

Adjacent reservoir reserves, declared conservation areas such as Telowie Gorge Conservation Park and Mount Remarkable National Park, as well as private heritage agreements also contribute to the significant area of native vegetation.

Future use of options in these areas should be in accordance with the Native Vegetation Act 1983 and Regulations and other relevant legislation.

5.7 Aboriginal interests

There are currently no sites of Aboriginal cultural significance recorded on the Register of Aboriginal Sites and Objects for any of the Mid North Forests. However, the Register is not a comprehensive record of all sites and there may be sites and/or objects present that are not officially listed.

The Nukunu people have a registered Native Title Claim (SAD6012/1998) which includes the areas in and surrounding Wirrabara and Bundaleer Forest Reserves. The Njadjuri Nation has a registered Native Title Claim (SAD304/2011) which includes the areas in and surrounding Yarcowie and Leighton Forest Reserves. For general information visit the National Native Tribunal website at www.nntt.gov.au
6.0 EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

6.1 Responding to this REOI

Expressions of Interest (EOIs), addressing the Expression of Interest Criteria listed in Section 6.4 below and prepared in accordance with the Terms of Request included document, must be delivered prior to 5.00pm on 28 August 2015 by mail, in person, or by e-mail, and be clearly marked CONFIDENTIAL to PIRSA at the following address:

Mid North Forests - Expression of Interest
C/- Ms Cindy Roberts
Primary Industries and Regions, SA
GPO Box 1671
Level 14, 25 Grenfell Street
Adelaide SA 5000
pirsa.forestry@sa.gov.au

EOIs must be lodged under cover of the Expression of Interest Lodgement Form and should be marked Confidential.

6.2 Inspection

The Mid North Forests can be inspected by interested parties. Please contact ForestrySA at their Wirrabara office on (08) 8668 5000 for any access restrictions and to obtain required permits.

6.3 Review process

The review of the EOIs lodged will be undertaken by the Government. It will review the merits of each EOI against the EOI Criteria, for the purpose of identifying those parties with the organisational and financial capacity both to play a meaningful part in the re-configuration and re-purposing of the forests and to undertake the direct acquisitions or other appropriate commercial transactions that would be necessary in due course.

6.4 Expression of interest criteria

Responses to the REOI will be considered according to the following criteria, which are listed in no particular order and to which no particular weightings have been assigned. The purpose of the criteria is to assist the Government review the merits of the EOIs against its respective objectives. The criteria are:

• the extent to which the proposed use is able to utilise and enhance the environmental, cultural, heritage and community values associated with the Mid North Forests;

• the commercial impact the proposed use will have on the local community and broader regional development, including the impact on the regional economy, job creation, diversification of employment opportunities, and adjacent rural centres;

• the extent to which the proposed use is economically viable or otherwise feasible;
• whether the proposed use would be either complementary to or in conflict with any existing or other proposed uses, any existing interests, any applicable restraints, or any applicable policies plans or strategies, in the chosen locality;
• indicative requirements for services and other infrastructure;
• alignment with the Government’s higher order economic and planning objectives and strategies;
• the nature and extent of the experience of the Respondent in the planning, permitting, design, construction, operation and maintenance of projects generally, and in relation to the proposed land use;
• whether the Respondent seeks to purchase or lease land;
• the financial capacity of the Respondent and its ability to fund its proposal;
• native title or Aboriginal heritage matters;
• value for money for the Government including the nature and extent of any government contribution that may be required; and
• such other matters the Government may consider relevant given the nature and content of a proposal.

If Respondents wish to make an offer to purchase or lease land, then a price or rental (as appropriate) should be indicated, but an offer price for land is not a mandatory requirement for the lodgement of EOI.

6.5 Next steps
EOIs received will help inform the Government to determine a way forward for the Mid North Forests. This may involve further steps including:
• discussions and negotiations with selected parties for purposes of finalising commercial arrangements and implementing the relevant proposals;
• a further competitive process or processes (which could include discrete processes in relation to various portions of the land); or
• a combination of the above.
7.0 ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

PIRSA

PIRSA has a wide range of resource materials and maps available online including locality, recreation and heritage features, infrastructure, land use, rainfall, transport, business enterprises, and crop potential maps.

PIRSA web resources:

ForestrySA

Northern Forests Forest Management Plan (ForestrySA 2008)

Northern Forests Native Forest Reserves Resource Document (ForestrySA 2011)

Strategic Directions for the Mid North Plantation Estate (Parsonson 2014)

South Australian Government Mapping Data

State Government open data - roads, satellite or topographic

South Australian Government higher order economic and planning objectives and strategies

Seven Strategic Priorities:

Ten Economic Priorities:
http://economic.priorities.sa.gov.au

South Australia’s Strategic Plan:
http://saplan.org.au/targets

Planning Strategy for South Australia:

Regional resources

Mid North Region Plan:

Northern and Yorke Regional NRM Plan:

Other

State of the Climate 2014: