

LOWER ORANGE RIVER TRANSFRONTIER CONSERVATION AREA PLANNING

BACKGROUND INFORMATION DOCUMENT

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1 INTRODUCTION

Challenges regarding cross-border resource management are compounded when rivers are used as international boundaries. The Lower Orange River, stretching from Augrabies falls to the mouth, largely forms the border between Namibia and South Africa, yet also represents an eco-region characterised by two climate regions, as well as two broad vegetation biomes.

The region has numerous protected areas including the Augrabies falls National Park; /Ai-/Ais-Hotsprings Game Park, Sperrgebiet, Richtersveld National Park, the Orange River mouth Ramsar site; Namaqua National Park and Marine Protected Area, as well as several Provincial, Private and Communal Conservation Areas, including the Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape World Heritage Site.

The LOR serves as the contact zone between the two countries and brings numerous landowners together in a mosaic bounded together by the river. Conservationists, stock farmers, irrigation farmers, mines, and white water operators, are all competing for access and use of the river.

Effectively the river serves as a zip to pull a patchwork mosaic of land users together into a single quilt. This quilt however extends far beyond the river and constitutes numerous habitats which extend beyond the boundaries of specific conservation areas, transcending the international boundary. The river is the midpoint of the quilt, not the frayed edge of a single protected area either, albeit National Park; Provincial Protected Area; Private Conservation Area; Communal Conservation Area or Property.

2 LOR TRANSFRONTIER CONSERVATION AREA PLANNING INITIATIVES

2.1 Background

As a major dynamic conservation initiative the establishment of Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) is currently being implemented across the southern African region. This initiative, which constitutes some of the most ambitious conservation projects in the world today, has been hailed as a step in the right direction for Africa's eco-tourism development. These projects aim to establish large conservation and wildlife areas not only through the integration of vast landscapes and re-connecting ecological systems, but also through development of cross-border tourism linkages, ensuring sustainable benefits to local communities through socio-economic upliftment, and the promotion of peace and stability in the region.

The establishment of TFCAs is an exemplary process of partnerships between governments, NGOs, communities and the private sector. While the main players are the relevant governments and implementing agencies, donors and NGOs also greatly contribute towards these initiatives. TFCAs in South Africa are facilitated by the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) and MET in Namibia.

In a 2002 inventory on potential TFCAs in the SADC region, two areas along LOR were identified, namely the /Ai-/Ais-Richtersveld option and that of the Trans-Gariep region near Onseepkans. The former option, in being supported by existing protected areas, has triggered TFCA action and on 1 August 2003 the Heads of State of the two partner countries (South Africa and Namibia) signed a Treaty to form a TFCA.

The /Ai-/Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park (ARTP) was established and a Joint Management Board (JMB) consisting of representatives from Namibia and South Africa constituted.

(Refer Figure 1.)

2.2 Projects

Unlocking the ecotourism potential of the Lower Orange Rivere Region necessitates a harmonious balance being achieved between the management of natural and cultural resources, sustainable business development and equitable sharing and distribution of benefits.

Recognising the sovereignty of both Namibia and South Africa, while co-ordinating planning initiatives between and within the countries requires an integrated approach providing each country sufficient information to inform decision making. Numerous planning and co-ordination initiatives are currently being aligned to assist the region in unlocking its potential in a sustainable and equitable manner.

(Refer Figures 2 – 4.)

2.2.1 Integrated Conservation and Development Plan (ICDP) for the South African component of the Lower Orange TFCA

Since the extent of the Transfrontier Conservation Area surrounding the Park has not been defined a process has been initiated to develop the /Ai-/Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Conservation Area (ARTFCA) which would include the area adjacent to the Transfrontier Conservation Park (i.e. the various privately-owned and state-owned conservation areas) characterised by compatible forms of land use but not lending itself to formal integration with the Transfrontier Park.

In South Africa, the TFCA process started in 2005 with a stakeholder meeting in Port Nolloth to discuss the proposed development of the ARTFCA with several subsequent key stakeholder meetings and an Arid Cluster Advisory Committee was established to oversee implementation. This Committee consists of representatives of the DEAT, the Northern Cape Department of Tourism, Environment and Conservation (DTEC), South African National Park (SANParks), Local Government, and the Peace Parks Foundation (PPF).

The Committee prepared a project brief for the preparation of an Integrated Conservation Development Plan (ICDP) for the South African component of the LOR TFCA. The ICDP will define the TFCA boundaries on the South African side and will serve to facilitate and optimise the value and benefits which may arise from the potential development of a TFCA along the LOR

The key objectives of this Plan would be to:

- determine the Natural and Cultural Resource Conservation potential of the area;
- realise the Socio-Economic Development and Land Use Potential (including tourism potential) of the area;
- understand the legal and policy context that guides conservation and development in the area;
- define the scope for potential TFCA development on the South African side;
- facilitate stakeholder participation; and
- determine the most appropriate Institutional Arrangements for the implementation of the Plan.

A consultative process involving all the relevant key stakeholders and institutions involved in the management of the area will be adopted in developing the Plan.

2.2.2 TFCA Planning in Namibia

In an effort to clarify the TFCA boundaries for the Namibian component of the LOR TFCA, an Intergovernmental committee, consisting of National and Regional Governments, will utilise information emanating from the planning initiatives.

Through the MET, Namibia is establishing co-operative partnerships with both private and communal landowners, which will jointly define the scope for potential TFCA development on the Namibian side of the planning region.

Within this co-operative partnership the most appropriate institutional arrangements will be determined and implemented.

2.2.3 Resource Management Plan for the LOR

Recognising that the LOR is an important lifeline to the arid western part of South Africa, it is important that the river should be jointly planned to ensure that all aspects relating to the biodiversity, national and cultural resources management, the utilisation of the water and related resources, and the dissemination of benefits emanating from the use and conservation of resources is equitably controlled and managed.

A process for the compilation of a Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the LOR (from Au-grabies National Park to the Orange River Mouth) via a transboundary stakeholder participation process will be launched in early September 2007. This plan will address unlocking the ecotourism potential of the river and will however give due consideration to the impacts of other land and water uses including mining, agriculture etc. on conservation and ecotourism potential of the river.

2.3 Alignment of Planning

To prevent stakeholder fatigue within the region, the conservation planning initiatives within each country will be aligned with the LOR RMP workshops. Addressed in this manner each country will be able to compile conservation development plans appropriate to their legislation and needs, while the shared resources along the river will be planned in a manner compliant with SADEC protocols both for the water and conservation.

Having common objectives the plans can be jointly workshopped, ensuring alignment within the region, yet culminating in three distinct phases- one for Namibia, one for South Africa, and one for the shared resource.

A consultative, interactive and participatory planning process is to be implemented. The success of the entire process is dependant on the degree to which stakeholders are capacitated to ensure a common understanding of the role of the TFCA and LOR as contact zone between the two countries, and jointly plan the utilisation and conservation of the shared resource

To accommodate the affected local communities within the study area, the project will be planned in three clusters, the first being Au-grabies, the second Pella/Warmbad, and the third the ARTP area. The aim is to have plans that are locally relevant, yet regionally aligned.

The planning process is based on localised plans addressing both the country specific, as well as shared resource issues in an aligned and co-ordinated manner. Following the project announcement detailed planning sessions will be facilitated, culminating in an aligned publicly reviewed plan for the shared resources, as well as country specific conservation development plans , for the region.

The planning process will terminate with a handing over ceremony during which the affected stakeholders will hand over the respective plans to the relevant authorities.

Undertaken in this way, stakeholders can hold the JMB accountable for the management and control of shared resources and the alignment of conservation initiatives across international boundaries.

(Refer Figure 5.)

CONTACTS

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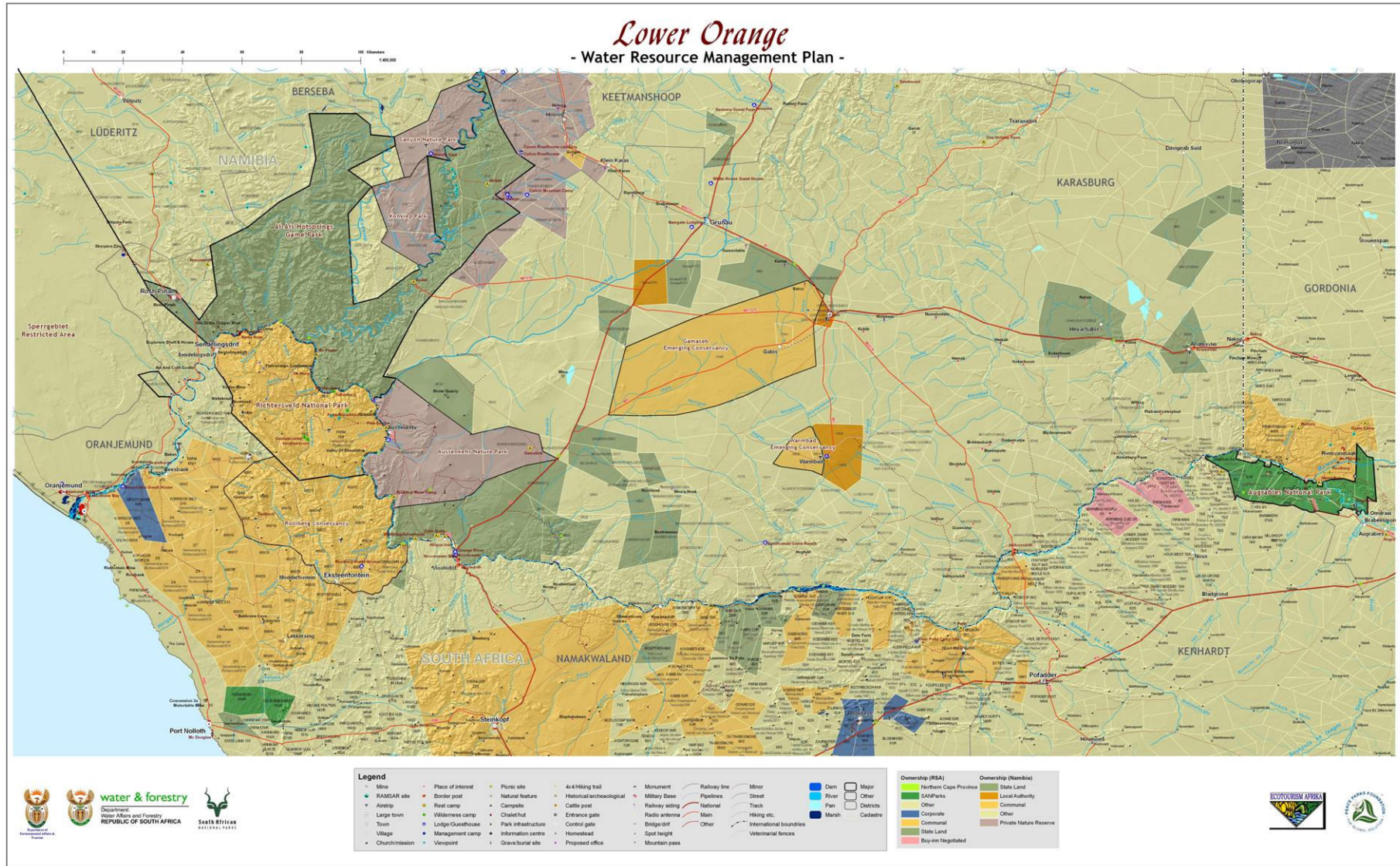


Figure 1: Focal Conservation Areas

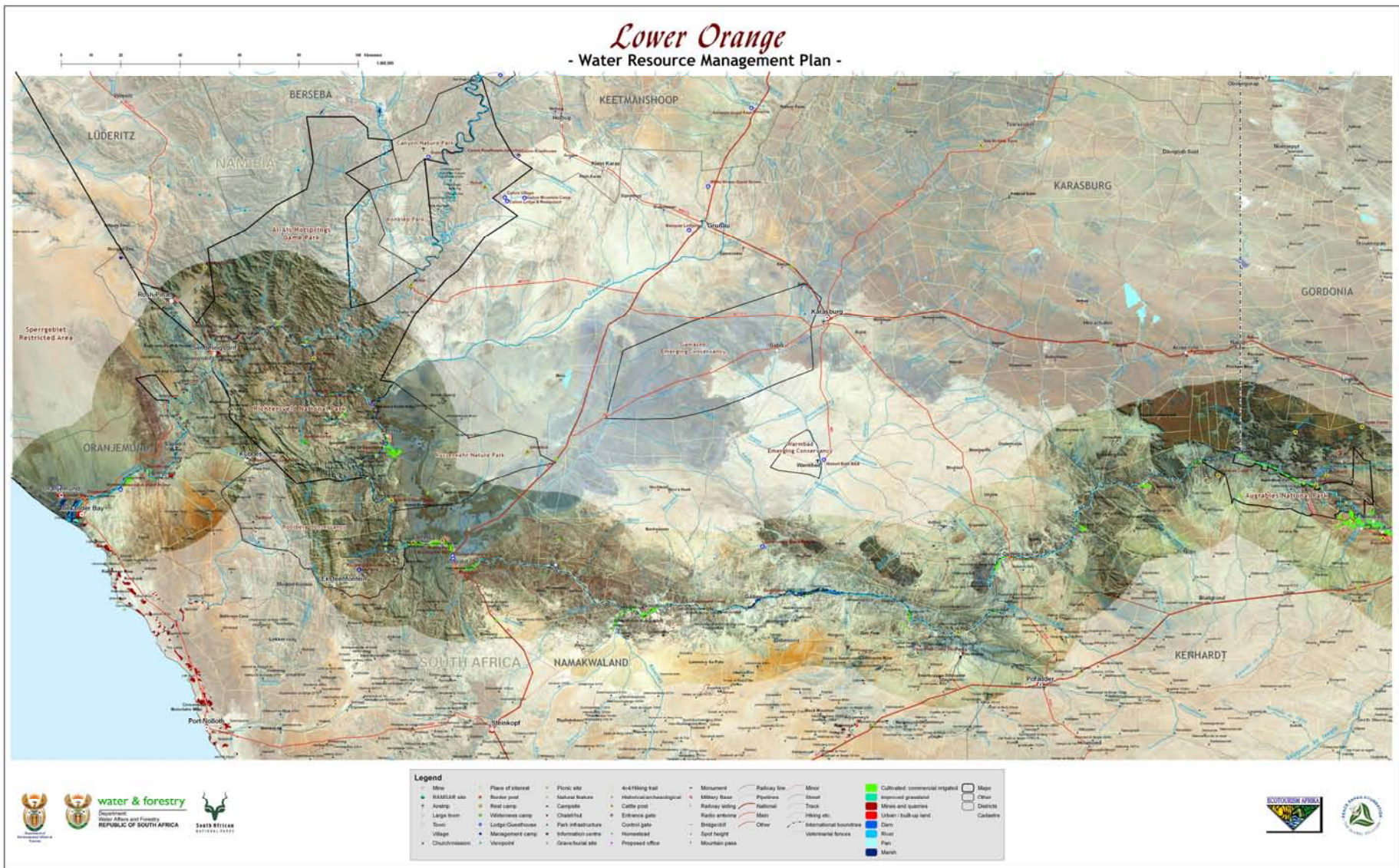


Figure 2: Project Scope: Resource Management Plan

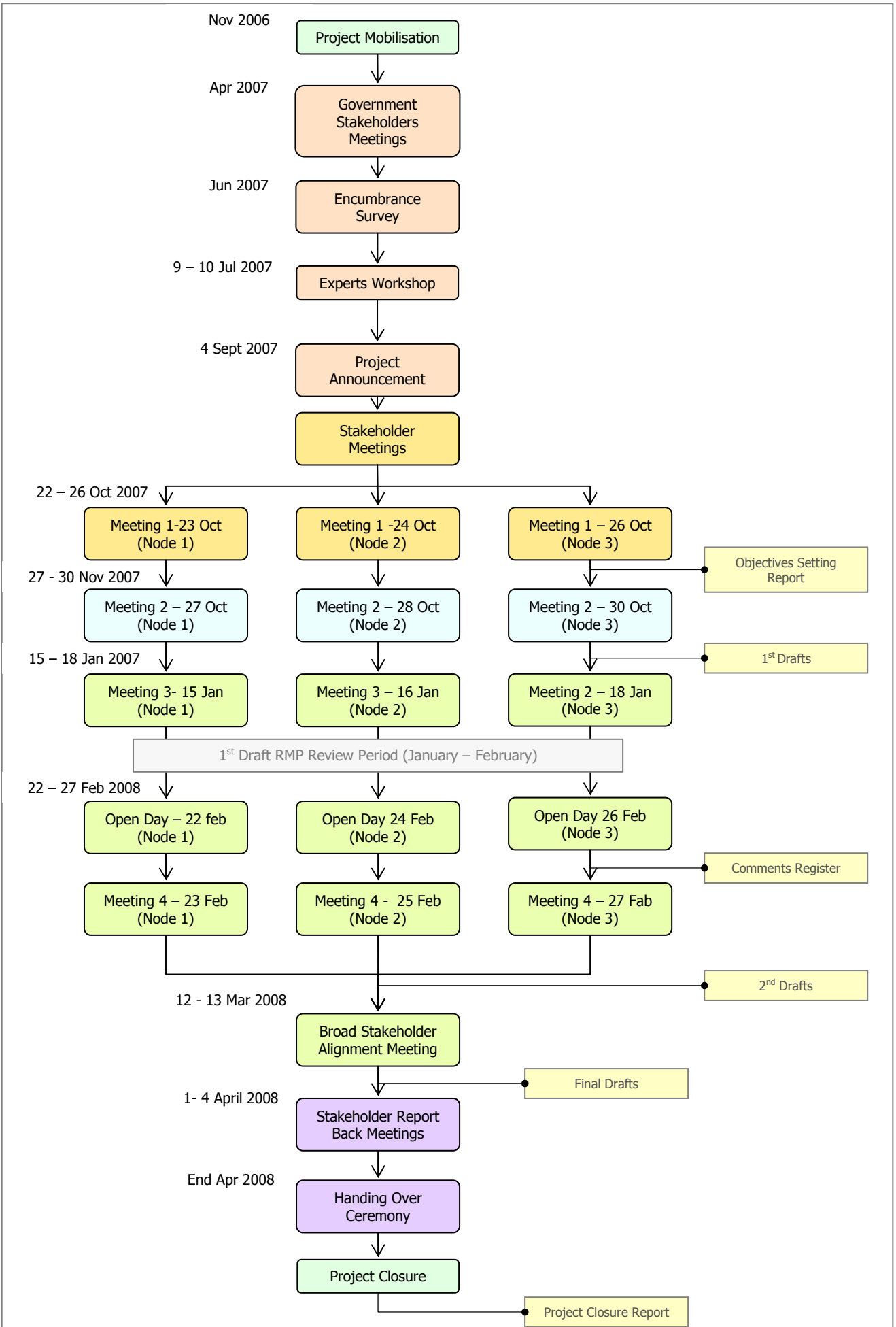


Figure 5: Process Diagram