

Total Catchment Management
Community And Government Working Together

Wollondilly Catchment Committee

15 July, 1999

The Secretary
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir

In NSW catchment management committees are appointed by the State Minister for Department of Land and Water Conservation. Committees consist of appointees from landholders, environmental interests and members of various government agencies. The role of catchment management committees (CMC's) is to liaise with and advise local councils and other bodies in the best practice processes to manage the land, water and biodiversity issues arising in each catchment.

Relatively small allocations of monies are made available annually for administration and to finance some small projects under \$5,000 each. CMC's have no statutory authority to act other than in an advisory capacity and to a lesser extent in a participatory capacity.

The system theoretically should work well and the CMC's are theoretically coordinated by a State Catchment Management Coordinating Committee. The advantages of the system are that the opportunity to identify environmental degradation and/or problems is placed at the grass roots level. However, in practice, there are several problem areas that need to be addressed in order to attain to a more efficient function for the CMC's.

There is a most unfortunate tendency for problems to be addressed by system of enquiry usually resulting in a "restructuring" of the system with a consequent breakdown of confidence in the effectiveness of plans and a disillusionment of the participants. This is because the real cause of problems of structure and resourcing are not identified and solutions found to the operational difficulties. A restructure or the introduction of another level of administration tends only to consume some more of the scarce resources available to deal with environmental problems on the ground.

The operational problems of conducting a supportable and efficient CMC system are actually quite simple and will emerge as we address the disadvantages of the system **AS IT EXISTS**. These follow:



Wollondilly Catchment Committee, PO Box 390, Goulburn NSW 2580
Ph: (02) 4823 0642. Fax: (02) 4823 0750.

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DIRECTION

1. There is a lack of specific direction as to exactly what a CMC should be adopting as its specific goals. This results in a fair degree of meandering around without cohesive regional goals.

RESOURCING

2. There is a distinct lack of resources for CMC's to finance what it can easily see or easily determine as local catchment problems. CMC's usually are allowed to act fairly autonomously (and this is a great advantage) but the financial resources are simply not there for CMC's to achieve environmental improvement on a significant scale.

MEMBERSHIP

3. Membership of CMC's are appointed for a period of three years but the selection process can be easily flawed resulting in 'dead weight' members not participating.

Whilst we have only addressed what we see as three major problems of catchment management we should emphasise that we have great faith in the ability of CMC's to be effective if these major problems were addressed. Far too much time, energy and resources are being absorbed by trying to address the problems from the top down and not from the bottom up. The real environmental problems exist at ground level and that is where they must be solved. CMC's can play a vital role in identifying where it should go; this can be an entirely wasted effort if the means to achieve are absorbed by higher levels of administration.

The CMC system is a 21st century solution but it must be adequately resourced to be effective.

The Federal Government is sinking substantial funds into Natural Heritage Trust projects. Quite often these projects are of doubtful benefit from an environmental urgency perspective. And yet often CMC's are denied access to this funding.

If the Federal Government is sincere in its inquiry it should be looking at understanding and assisting the growth development and achievability of the NSW catchment management system which currently exists.

Yours faithfully
David Lemerle
Chairman

