



## Queensland University of Technology

30 July 1999

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

Dear Members of the Standing Committee,

I am responding to the call for submissions on catchment management in Australia. For the past several years I have been researching integrated environmental management efforts in eastern Australia. In 1996, I focused a considerable part of my research on catchment management committees in Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria. Since that time I have been researching several integrated management topics, including institutional arrangements, implementation issues, and the role of local government planning. I have mailed the Committee (separately) several articles that I have published from this research that may be helpful for your review. The Centre for Water Policy Research also published a summary of my 1996 research as an occasional paper (ISBN 1-86389-329-6, Armidale: University of New England).

I believe that integrated management approaches are at a crossroads in Australia. In its current form it has produced varied responses, ranging from truly integrated efforts to forums for discussion. It is highly dependent on National Heritage Trust funding, but has received only moderate support from state and Commonwealth agencies. I believe that many of the natural resource problems that Australia will be facing in the next several years require an integrated approach. We can no longer focus on narrow, single purpose objectives without considering the interactive issues and effects. In particular, we need to revise the catchment management model to produce a broader and more substantial integrated management approach. This does not mean scrapping the excellent work already done by some catchment committees. However, it does mean expanding the model to include the local government and natural resource planning on a regional scale.

Below I have highlighted some of the most critical challenges and issues facing Australia. I refer you to my articles for more detail and will gladly offer my contributions to any future discussions.

### **Management Unit**

While catchments offer a convenient unit for managing some resources, it is not always the most appropriate scale. In some cases, biological regions, planning regions or river basins are more logical management units. This is particularly important to consider in light of limited state agency personnel, limited local government staff, and the scale of other planning efforts (e.g., regional planning, water allocation management planning). For this reason, I use the term integrated environmental management (IEM) throughout this document rather than catchment management.

### **Agency Support**

In my past research, I found that Australian agency involvement in IEM efforts have not always produced active support or engagement. Many agency staff involved in stakeholder committees referred to their roles in terms of "technical advisers" or "providing information to the committee on my agency's policies." These types of views do not reflect the collaborative approach required for an integrated

approach, but rather a very limited, one-way view of community and stakeholder communication. Clearly, if IEM efforts in Australia are going to be integrated, commitment is required from agency staff and administrators.

### **Funding**

One way of gaining agency commitment to integrated management, as demonstrated by the interest in National Heritage Trust (NHT) funding, is to fund integrated management efforts directly. Many resource and environmental problems cut across agency, disciplinary and legislative boundaries so that no one program or agency can fund it alone (or is willing to). The Australian government should direct more funding into competitive, multi-year, project grants that would entice agencies to work together. This could even be accomplished by reallocating some existing baseline funding through regional integrated management efforts.

### **Planning Integration**

The changes to local government planning in Australia offer new opportunities to increase the integration with natural resource management. Local and state governments are being asked to develop more sophisticated urban and regional planning approaches and relate them to natural resource management. However, this requires state and federal agencies to become more knowledgeable about the planning process and more clear about state and federal objectives. Furthermore, in many rural areas, the limited rate base for local government authorities means that they do not have the funds or resources to adequately study or manage these issues.

### **Institutional Arrangements**

Stakeholder committees such as catchment management committees are just one piece of the institutional puzzle required for successful delivery of IEM. These committees can usually address broad strategic direction, but a broader range of decisions makers needs to be involved. Therefore, an integrated approach requires structures and mechanisms that facilitate information exchange and joint decision making. For example, an inter-agency working party might provide a forum for information sharing and consultation about use and development permits while maintaining individual organisational powers. Integration requires better and more "regularised" interaction among natural resource decision-makers on a daily basis.

### **State and Federal Commitment**

Many of the decisions that occur at a local or regional level are affected by state and federal legislation and policies. Although state catchment committees have provided an avenue for addressing conflicts between local issues and state policies, a more powerful forum is required to address these issues adequately. Furthermore, federal programs and legislation need to be more cognisant of local and regional implementation.

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Catchment Management in Australia has led to an impressive set of accomplishments considering its small funding base. It has helped demonstrate how collaborative approaches to natural resource management can produce community support, resolve conflicts and achieve successful outcomes. However, catchment management efforts have had a limited impact in terms of both scale and scope, in large part because of the factors listed above. Most future environmental problems are not going to be single-issue, single-focus ones, but complex, interrelated and multi-dimensional problems that require an equally sophisticated response. Natural resource management in Australia needs to be expanded to respond to these future challenges and bring together catchment, natural resource, and town planning.

Thank you for considering this submission. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you would like further information.

Sincerely,

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