

## **Submission by the Bennett Brook Catchment Group**

**On: Catchment Management**

**To: House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia**

- **The development of Catchment Management in Australia**

**Catchment Management began in the rural areas of Australia, where soil erosion and rising watertables and salinity have reduced productivity in many areas. The focus in these areas has been on private land, and the landholders involved have directly benefited from time and money invested. Recently there has been a move to establish Catchment Management in urban areas, where rivers and lakes are suffering from eutrophication. This area is currently rapidly expanding, and differs from rural ICM in that much work is carried out on public lands, and the benefits are to the general community, in the form of a cleaner environment.**

- **The value of a Catchment approach to the management of the environment**

**The benefit of a Catchment approach to management of the environment lies in its holistic approach to problems. Integrated Catchment Management attempts to involve all key stakeholders within the Catchment in solving problems. It also looks at all the natural resource management issues within the Catchment, and the ways that they are linked. This overall approach is the most effective way of developing Best Management Practices, and of gaining the support of the people living within the catchment. A third and important component of ICM is the striving for long-term sustainable answers to environmental issues. The community are better placed to plan for long-term sustainability, as government must necessarily plan over a shorter term due to budgetary restrictions, or length of office.**

- **Best practice methods of preventing, halting and reversing environmental degradation in Catchment, and achieving environmental sustainability.**

**Some information is available in this area, and it is changing rapidly as results of trials are monitored. Rural areas have been carrying out trials for many years, and have some good data to base future plans on. Problems in urban areas are more poorly researched, and much remains to be done to determine the effects of diffuse pollution sources, and the methods of dealing with this problem. Legislation may be required in some areas, such as restriction of water use.**

- **The role of different levels of government, the private sector and the community in the management of Catchment areas.**

All of the above sectors have a role to play in Catchment management, however community is ideally placed to drive the process. The community is THE key stakeholder in any Catchment, and without their strong support it is difficult to achieve significant results. Allowing the community to lead Catchment management instills a sense of ownership and empowers the community. The community is also well placed to work with local and state government without the inter-departmental friction which can occur within government. Our catchment group has representation from two local councils, two government departments, the local aboriginal community and a privatised government department. Sponsorship and assistance from private industry is also best obtained through the community, rather than approaches at a government level. For example, our group has obtained sponsorship from a local business within the catchment, which has partly funded our project officer, and a local sub-division developer has donated money towards a project adjacent to the development. Care must be taken to ensure that the community is adequately resourced to carry out this important role.

- Planning, resourcing, implementation, coordination and cooperation in Catchment management

As mentioned above, Integrated Catchment Management is about cooperation amongst all stakeholders. If the process is to be driven by the community, it is necessary to ensure that adequate resources are available to the community to carry out the task. Often Community Catchment Groups are composed largely of volunteers, and it is easy to overload them to the point of burnout. It is vital that help in the form of administrative and technical support is provided. Paid project officers, a centre to work from, funds for projects and recognition and thanks are important components to ensure the long-term success of ICM. It must be recognised that the aim of catchment management is to obtain increasing participation in the process from the community. To allow for this, catchment management requires an increasing level of resources, not, as is currently imagined, a decreasing level over time. For example, in the 180sqkm semi-urban catchment of Bennett Brook, which began with a part-time catchment co-ordinator, the group now employs the part-time co-ordinator, a full time project officer, and a trainee to cope with the demand for involvement from the community. Five community groups and six schools are now actively developing projects, six planting projects are being developed for next year, and the group is actively developing a database on the natural resources within the catchment.

- Mechanisms for monitoring, evaluating and reporting on Catchment management programs, including the use of these reports for state of the environment reporting, and opportunities for review and improvement.

Whilst it would be useful to have standardized reporting forms which fit neatly into State of the Environment reporting, care must be taken to adequately evaluate the holistic nature of ICM. Catchment Groups across Australia vary enormously, and so will their methods of dealing with issues. In both urban and rural areas one of

**the most important and difficult tasks is to raise awareness and interest in the remainder of the community. This is difficult to measure, and is therefore often left out of evaluation. If we are to manage our environment sustainably in the long term, this is the factor which will be of crucial importance. If groups are forced by the nature of the accounting process to concentrate on on-ground achievements, it will delay the attudinal change in the community which will prevent the current problems from recurring.**

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