



Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority

Submission to The House of Representatives Inquiry into Catchment Management

August 1999

TOR1 The Development of Catchment Management in Australia

Victoria's ten CMA's were established 1st July 1997 under two Acts, the CaLP Act 1994 and the Water Act 1989. This formally brought together the management of land and water that had been separated since the late 1940's when the Soil Conservation Authority and the River Management Trusts were established.

In the Goulburn Broken Catchment, there has been a long history of integrated Catchment Management with the Salinity Program and River Trusts.

In 1995, The CaLP Board was established and charged with the responsibility of preparing an integrated Catchment Strategy. Fortunately, there was already in place a Land & Water Management Plan and Waterway Action Plans for the whole Catchment and were well on the way with a Water Quality Strategy.

The Catchment Strategy [attached] was finalised and endorsed by Government in 1997 and became the Strategic Plan for the CMA.

TOR2 The Value of a Catchment Approach to the Management of the Environment

The Goulburn Broken Catchment is part of the Murray Darling Basin. As such, the Catchment community has a responsibility to the downstream communities to act reasonably.

The Goulburn Broken Catchment is mindful of this responsibility and strongly supports the Murray Darling Basin:

- Salinity and Drainage Strategy;
- Cap on irrigation diversions; and
- Algal Management Strategy.

The MDBC Strategies provide the platform for natural resource planning in the Goulburn Broken Catchment. The Regional Catchment Strategy complements the above Strategies and ensures that Basin issues are not forgotten in our attempts to resolve Catchment and local problems.

Without a Catchment approach, it is only possible to treat symptoms not causes. It is also impossible to resolve community good/private rights issues if the only focus is at the local level. Over the last 15 years the Catchment Authority and its predecessors have learnt that strategic planning should be carried out at the Catchment scale and implementation at the Sub-Catchment level.

It is also essential that community involvement be maintained at all levels. Without community participation and ownership, these Strategies will be useless. The involvement of the community in the decision making process is a critical success factor for effective catchment management.

It is also important to maintain a strong partnership with the relevant Government Agencies to ensure a strong technical underpinning of the decision making process.

The Authority's structure of the Board, Implementation Committees, Landcare and other stakeholder groups has proven effective, however, the importance of good communication should not be underestimated.

The success of this approach is well recognised at the State, Murray Darling Basin and International levels. Last year, a high level World Bank delegation visited the Catchment and concluded that our area was the best example of integrated catchment/water resource management that they had seen anywhere in the world.

TOR3 Best practice methods of preventing, halting and reversing environmental degradation in catchments, and achieving environmental sustainability

Catchment Management must be knowledge driven. Natural systems are dynamic and complex and it is impossible to assemble a full complement of information. However, risk can be minimised if a rigorous science-based approach is taken. Decisions must be made in the context of risk minimisation not avoidance.

As discussed in TOR 2, planning at the Catchment scale and the implementation at the Sub-Catchment level is best practice. In the Goulburn Broken Catchment, the Catchment Strategy provides strategic planning and the Business Plan provides the implementation detail in a 3 year rolling time-frame.

The Catchment Strategy also sets out the cost sharing arrangements for each component of the Business Plan.

The Business Plan documents who does what by specifying the responsibilities of the relevant agencies and stakeholders.

When the Authority refers to integration, it is not just the integration of land and water management. It is the integration of the government agencies and the community in the decision making process.

TOR4 The role of different levels of Government, the private sector and the community in the management of Catchment areas

4.1 State Government

Land and Water Management is a State responsibility. The State Government's role includes:

- Developing policy;
- Endorsing the Catchment Strategy and the Action Plans that underpin it;
- Approving Business Plans and providing resources; and
- Managing public lands.

4.2 Federal Government

The Federal Government's role is to provide the Federal framework for natural resource management, legitimise processes and to support the States through investment.

4.3 Local Government

Local Government's key role in natural resource management is planning. As the planning authority, Local Government, in conjunction with referral authorities, plays the major role in controlling development in the Catchment.

Local Government also has some land management responsibilities

4.4 Catchment Authority

The Catchment Authority is the peak community based natural resource management organisation in the Catchment. The Authority is charged with the responsibility for:

- Strategy development;
- Setting priorities;
- Oversight of implementation; and
- Reporting.

The Authority has established Implementation Committees to provide advice on implementation and Co-ordinating Committees to provide advice on strategy development.

4.5 Private Sector

Two thirds of our Catchment is in private ownership and most of the natural resource management problems are on private lands. The private sector has the major role in implementing the Catchment Strategy. For the private sector to invest in Catchment management it must be either profitable or have access to non-farm income. Profitability in the extensive grazing industry is at an historic low and investment is correspondingly low. This has some major implications for the cost share arrangements that need to be in place.

Neil Barr ¹, in his Paper to the 1999 ABARE Conference, postulated that the Dryland Salinity Plan had been developed when wool prices were good and has not been adjusted to take into account the massive drop in wool growers' incomes.

4.6 General

The relationship between all parties is underpinned by:

- A long-term commitment to the Catchment Strategy;
- Endorsement of the cost sharing arrangements; and
- Community empowerment.

¹ Social Aspects of Rural Natural Resource Management – Neil Barr, Centre for Land Protection Research. Outlook '99 - Commodity Markets & Resource Management - Pages 132-140

TOR5 Planning, resourcing, implementation, co-ordination and co-operation in Catchment Management

The Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority is an excellent model which addresses all of the issues in this Terms of Reference. This model is described in the attached Consultant's report prepared by Northage & Associates.

This year, the Authority took responsibility for the disbursement of all grants previously managed by Department of Natural Resources & Environment, Goulburn-Murray Water and the Authority. This has been an effective tool in demonstrating planning, resourcing, implementation, co-ordination and co-operation. Each grant is accompanied by advice on the grant source, approval process and its connection to the Catchment Strategy.

Of some concern to the Authority is the use of Landcare Groups to manage devolved grants. It is unusual for a Landcare Group to have the capacity to meet the reporting and accountability requirements of the funding sources. Many groups find this responsibility to be a burden, while others *'cut their cloth'* and ignore or modify the requirements.

The Authority has responded by working with Landcare networks to develop Landcare Guidelines. These Guidelines have been prepared to assist Landcare Groups to meet these and other legal requirements. This document will improve the situation but does not address the problem of recording and reporting of works completed. A copy is attached for your information.

TOR6 Mechanisms for monitoring, evaluating and reporting on Catchment Management programs, including the use of these reports for state of the environment reporting and opportunity for review and improvement

6.1 Condition of the Catchment

The Authority under Section 14 of the Catchment and Land Protection Act has the responsibility to report on the condition of the Catchment:

“CaLP Act 1994 - Section 14 - Annual Report: A Board must submit to the Minister and the Council on or before 31 August in each year a report on the condition and management of land and water resources in its region and the carrying out of its functions.”

At the time of writing, a mechanism has not been developed which allows the Authority to do this in a meaningful way. The Catchment has an extensive monitoring network for streams and can report accurately on the condition of the catchment's streams and water resources.

Unfortunately monitoring of the land resource is significantly more difficult and may not be able to be achieved in a cost effective manner.

6.2 Reporting

The Authority is required to report on its activities within eight weeks of the end of the financial year. This report is audited by the Auditor-General and tabled in State Parliament.

Workloads of Catchment Management staff would be significantly reduced if agreement could be made between State and Federal funding bodies on reporting requirements. The Authority accepts that reporting is an important part of its role but contends reporting on individual projects up to three times is both inefficient and expensive.

6.3 New Incentive Tracking Systems [NITS]

The Catchment has developed a package which links the database with GIS. It allows us to store information on grants spatially, visually [through digitised photography] and financially. Known affectionately as NITS, this package has the potential to revolutionise how we manage and track grants on private lands.

6.4 Conclusion

- Standardisation of reporting formats would greatly reduce costs and improve efficiencies;
- State and environment reporting should be linked to the condition of Catchment reports; and
- NITS should be investigated for its potential to be used across Australia