

Ref: 1.006

Mr Ian Dundas  
Committee Secretary, Catchment Management Inquiry  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment  
and Heritage  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Dundas

### **Inquiry into Catchment Management**

Thank you for your letter of 2 July, in which you sought comments that may assist the Committee's Inquiry into Catchment Management. Our Corporation supports a wide range of national research programs into aspects of land, water and vegetation management. Many of these relate to catchment planning and management, and we view catchment management committees and organisations as an important stakeholder group to be involved in the Corporation's work. In addition to R&D, we have also supported a range of demonstration and evaluation projects within focus catchments to assist in raising awareness and in building catchment capacity for sound resource management. We also have a specific R&D program aimed at testing and evaluating different methods for integrating research results and supporting their application at a catchment scale.

Rather than try to provide an overview of the Corporation's portfolio and program, I have attached a copy of our most recent Stakeholders' Report. This provides a summary of our work in a readable form. Should you have any questions on our activities or particular research programs, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I would like to make a few general comments in respect of the Inquiry's terms of reference. First, there are clearly benefits in a catchment-scale approach to natural resource management. Many, although not all, aspects of land and water management need to be planned at a catchment scale in order to provide a sound basis for smaller-scale decisions and management actions at the scale of localities, individual properties or paddocks. Many of the results of resource management are expressed through the effects of water, and hence are best considered at a catchment scale. These include issues such as salt mobilisation and export, sediment and nutrient movements, and a range of biophysical reactions that are integrated and reflected in the status of river systems and their water.

However, it is also important to remember that some aspects of resource management, particularly those that relate to conservation of biodiversity, operate at landscape or bioregional scales that may encompass several catchments. Therefore, there needs to be flexibility in a catchment management approach in order to accommodate these broader-scale issues.

There are also regions of Australia where catchment management is probably not the most appropriate scale for managing natural resources. This is certainly the case in much of the rangelands, where water flows are infrequent and episodic, and planning and management is better related to land systems or sociologically-defined regions. A similar case could be made for some parts of the coast where catchments are relatively small and there are benefits in dealing with resource management issues, and sharing information and experience, across catchments.

The approach to catchment management differs widely between the States and Territories, particularly in the degree of political commitment and agency support, in the way in which catchment management organisations have been established (eg. statutory, with funding base), and this is often reflected in the relative effectiveness of the organisations. The role of different levels of government, rural industries, the private sector and community groups is also varied between these different models. A case can be made that catchment management is sufficiently well-established in Australia for there to be benefit in drawing out from the different experiences general principles and critical success factors. This is an important area in which the Commonwealth could provide leadership.

I trust these brief comments and the attached information will assist your Committee.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

Phil Price  
Executive Director

30 July 1999

*Att: LWRRDC Stakeholders' Report*