



SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE INQUIRY INTO CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

The Regional Flood Mitigation Programme (RFMP)

Background

Flood mitigation is an important aspect of catchment management in Australia. The Regional Flood Mitigation Programme (RFMP) is consistent with the principles of Total Catchment Management as outlined in *Best Practice Principles for Floodplain Management in Australia* (SCARM Technical Report Series, 1999).

The RFMP is a Federal Government Programme aimed at assisting State and local agencies to address priority flood-mitigation needs in rural and regional Australia on an ecologically sustainable basis.

Funding for the RFMP was announced in the Budget of 11 May 1999 and Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald launched the Programme on 12 May. \$6 million of Commonwealth funding has been provided in 1999-2000 and \$7 million has been included in the forward estimates for the two subsequent years.

The States and Local Governments will between them fund two-thirds of the cost of approved projects (except in the case of flood warning systems). The States will also match Commonwealth funds with 'new' State funding and will maintain their existing funding of State flood mitigation programs. This means that those projects not eligible for funding or not put forward as State priorities under the RFMP are likely to be funded under State only programmes more quickly than previously expected. Some \$60 million of new funding will be available for flood mitigation measures over the three years of the new Programme.

The Programme was developed in consultation with States, Territories, Local Government Associations and relevant Commonwealth Agencies (including the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Environment Australia and the Department of Finance and Administration as well as other key stakeholders).

Previously, Federal funding for flood mitigation and floodplain management directed at improved natural resource management has been available through the National Landcare Programme (NLP), now part of the Natural Heritage Trust. The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has overall responsibility for the Programme. The NLP continues to fund flood plain management projects with a focus on natural resource management outcomes.

The following is an extract from the RFMP Guidelines (attached).

“Waterways and their associated wetlands and floodplains provide habitat to native plants and animals. The ecological significance of flood dependent habitat, much of which has been lost through land clearing operations, drainage and changes to the river regimes, cannot be overemphasised.

“In view of the fundamental importance of the floodplains to the commercial, social and ecological well being of the nation, there is an obligation to present and future generations to manage the nation’s floodplains in a responsible and sustainable manner”

While flooding is obviously integral to a healthy floodplain, the effect on man-made infrastructure can be catastrophic. The RFMP aims to reduce the current flood damage bill and limit the increase in future damage whilst continuing to manage and, where possible, enhance the social, economic and environmental impacts associated with the human occupation of the floodplain.

Programme Outcomes

The Commonwealth’s outcomes sought by the Regional Flood Mitigation Programme are to:

- promote community safety and protect community infrastructure through the provision of flood mitigation works and measures;
- achieve complementary environmental enhancement of the floodplain ecological systems; and
- implement flood mitigation projects in accordance with the principles of total or integrated catchment management and ecologically sustainable development and in accordance with established best practice.

Funding for projects will be applied in the context of the principles of risk reduction, cost effectiveness, the precautionary principle, inter-generational equity and conservation of biodiversity and ecological integrity.

Assessment Process

Potential projects will be developed at the local level and subject to community scrutiny and extensive technical assessment, including potential and actual flood damages, hazard levels as well as an overall assessment of the soundness of the project.

The State, through its nominated lead agency, will assess applications for funding under the RFMP while the Commonwealth will have observer status at assessment meetings. This stage of assessment will ensure that best practice is employed in the development and design of the project. Best practice applies not only to the technical (engineering), economic and social aspects of the project but also considers the environmental management of the project and its environs. The process will also ensure that all necessary State and Federal Government approvals and permissions, under environment, heritage, planning and other relevant legislation have been or are in the process of being obtained.

During this process, the Department of Transport and Regional Services works closely with Environment Australia to consider potentially environmentally significant applications for funding under the RFMP. Particular attention is given to the protection of threatened

species and biodiversity as is consistent with *Best Practice Guidelines for Floodplain Management in Australia*.

The Department of Transport and Regional Services has therefore sought to produce a Programme which considers flooding from a catchment-wide perspective acknowledging both the upstream and downstream implications of flood mitigation activities.