

House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Environment and Heritage

Inquiry into Catchment Management

**QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT
SUBMISSION**

August 1999

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	1
<u>THE DEVELOPMENT OF CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT IN AUSTRALIA</u>	1
<i>Ad hoc development across Australia</i>	1
<i>Queensland's development of catchment management</i>	2
<i>Recent trends and issues impacting on catchment management</i>	3
<u>THE VALUE OF A CATCHMENT APPROACH TO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT</u>	4
<i>Benefits of catchment management approaches</i>	4
<i>Alternatives to catchment-based approaches</i>	5
<i>Queensland's process to determine future arrangements for catchment management</i>	5
<u>BEST PRACTICE METHODS OF PREVENTING, HALTING AND REVERSING ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN CATCHMENTS, AND ACHIEVING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY</u>	6
<u>THE ROLES OF DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS</u>	7
<i>Division of roles and responsibilities</i>	7
<i>Role of State Governments</i>	8
<i>Role of Local Governments</i>	9
<i>Roles of communities, industries and individuals</i>	9
<u>PLANNING, RESOURCING AND IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS</u>	10
<i>Planning</i>	10
<i>Resourcing</i>	10
<i>Implementation</i>	11
<u>MECHANISMS FOR MONITORING, EVALUATING AND REPORTING</u>	13

QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION
to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage
Inquiry into Catchment Management

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

1. The over-arching paradigm within which catchment management occurs in Australia is that of encouraging local responsibility for the management of natural resources. This trend has many significant implications for collaboration between Government, community and industry now and in the future. In the experience of the Queensland Government, key issues about local stewardship of resources which must be considered in the Inquiry are:
 - in the face of increasing demands on communities for involvement, groups and individuals need more assistance from Governments to develop their capacity to respond to local catchment and natural resource management (NRM) issues;
 - ‘volunteerism’ is declining generally in the community, and there are growing expectations by community stakeholders that they should be fairly compensated for their involvement;
 - community involvement in catchment management is most effective where there is a clear focus to galvanise action, and where catchment issues are related to maintaining local economic or social values;
 - community-based management needs appropriate statutory support;
 - catchment and NRM planning must be linked more effectively into regional planning frameworks, which should themselves reflect State and National priorities;
 - Government and non-government agencies should use compatible and linked processes in carrying out their functions (e.g. planning and reporting processes, data collection);
 - community-based NRM needs to be supported by a nationally consistent approach to the definition of desirable outcomes, consolidation of data and coordination of research;
 - there is a lack of continuity and certainty in the system of three-year funding cycles, and the Commonwealth Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) funding process should be targeted more closely to State and National priorities; and
 - the commitment of the agricultural and industry sectors is critical to achieving catchment and natural resource objectives.

2. Using river catchments as the basis of NRM approaches is effective and appropriate where a local natural resource problem or issue is physically or ecologically related to a catchment. However, planning and management arrangements should also reflect other issues such as a community’s level of capacity to participate. Therefore, the Queensland Government supports a flexible approach to community involvement in NRM, taking into account the following key issues:
 - local NRM planning and management units should be able to be aggregated upwards to fit within larger ‘regions’ which are the basis for a strategic approach to planning and targeting of funding;
 - in some areas, management arrangements may be most effective when based on factors such as local community capacity and cohesion, rather than biophysical characteristics;
 - there needs to be a ‘seamless’ (but not necessarily identical) approach to catchment management across State borders; and

- catchment management objectives must be translated into Local Government planning outcomes.
2. Some potential responses to these issues which could be pursued at National and State levels are:
- development of generic guidelines for catchment management based on different catchment types which have similar management requirements, such as particular landscapes, environments, 'river styles' or bioregions;
 - developing a more collaborative and integrated national approach to research and information exchange;
 - developing guidelines for community-based NRM groups on 'capacity-building' issues such as use of information technology, leadership skills and facilitation;
 - developing an integrated approach between agencies involved in community development work and NRM issues;
 - developing a policy approach to the limits within which State Governments will devolve responsibility to community-based groups – for example, by defining how public interests will be protected;
 - examining possibilities for the role of a national Environmental Commissioner; and
 - developing national databases, such as for water quality, river health and catchment health.

QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION
to the
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage
Inquiry into Catchment Management

Introduction

The Queensland Government welcomes the House of Representatives Standing Committee Inquiry into Catchment Management in Australia. The Inquiry is particularly timely because of the growing pressures on water and other natural resources, and the increasing recognition by communities and Governments of the need for cooperation in managing resources on a sustainable basis.

It is noted that the Standing Committee will seek further input through consultations around Australia. As the current Terms of Reference are very broad, the Queensland Government recommends that the current phase of the Inquiry should develop specific recommendations based on the Submission process, so that clear options form the basis of any further consultations.

The following Submission is structured under the headings provided in the Terms of Reference. Particular attention has been paid to highlighting issues arising from Queensland's experience in catchment management, which have relevance to national issues. Input has been provided to the Submission by Queensland State Government agencies with an interest in catchment management.

The Development of Catchment Management in Australia

Ad hoc development across Australia

Catchment-based approaches to the management of water and other natural resources have developed in an *ad hoc* fashion across Australia. The result is a mixture of approaches by different States and even within States. For example, hundreds of Landcare groups have been formed and numerous other community-based and government-supported 'catchment management' and 'river-based' management initiatives have been established. Each State has developed different structural and funding arrangements, different types of legislative support for catchment management, and different ranges or scope of issues integrated into a single planning and management approach.

For example, in New South Wales, the 'Total Catchment Management' approach aims to integrate land, water and vegetation management into a single planning and management approach. In other States, 'single issue' approaches have been adopted, such as the Catchment Water Management Boards in South Australia, which focus on water issues. In terms of funding for onground actions, some groups rely on State Government assistance and/or funding through the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT), whilst others have the capacity to generate funds through levying ratepayers within their catchment.

This diversity of arrangements is not necessarily detrimental to efficient management, as arrangements naturally vary in response to local issues and conditions. However, there is considerable scope for all States to benefit from greater cooperation and information exchange about catchment management approaches and outcomes. For example, States could increase efficiency by cooperating on the development of generic guidelines for catchment management in different catchment types or 'river styles'. There could also be a more cooperative and integrated approach to research and enhancement of information exchange. Another issue which could be addressed at a national level is the development of a seamless approach to catchment management where catchments cross State borders, though this does not necessarily mean that identical administrative arrangements should be adopted.

Queensland's development of catchment management

Queensland has a history of local, voluntary involvement in the management of its natural resources. For decades, groups have formed and adapted to address specific natural resource management (NRM) concerns. Queensland's River Improvement Trusts, established in the 1940s, are one of the earliest examples of community and local government-based arrangements for service delivery. Along with the Drainage Boards, they are statutory bodies which can raise funds to carry out their work.

The Landcare program commenced officially in Queensland in 1989, coinciding with the Commonwealth's *Decade of Landcare*. There are currently some 270 groups involved in Landcare in Queensland.

In 1991, the Queensland Government introduced another community-based approach, Integrated Catchment Management (ICM). This reflects the State Government philosophy that community participation is fundamental to success in achieving catchment management outcomes. ICM has focused on the development of strategies to achieve integrated management of natural resources within a river catchment. Its introduction reflected the general trend at the time towards strengthening community consultation and involvement processes.

A number of Catchment Coordinating Committees (CCCs) were set up across Queensland under the ICM framework. These CCCs take an integrated approach to water, soil and vegetation management within specific river catchments. The groups provide planning, coordination and advisory functions and a focus for community involvement and the implementation of strategies. Currently, there are 25 formally endorsed CCCs in Queensland, one regional committee in the Murray-Darling Basin and six Steering Committees (not yet at endorsement stage).

There is currently no legislative base for these ICM groups in Queensland. The question of statutory support for catchment management is an issue which is being investigated by the State Government in consultation with community groups.

Queensland also has 13 Regional Strategy Groups (RSGs) for developing natural resource management strategies. A Ministerial Committee, the Natural Heritage Committee of Ministers, endorses the RSGs and their products. Currently, regional strategies have been completed for the Wet Tropics (pending endorsement) and the Murray-Darling regions, and Cape York Peninsula (recently endorsed). Other strategies range from early to advanced stages of development.

As an example of how these groups work together in Queensland, in the Mackay/Whitsunday region there are three ICM groups, three River Improvement Trusts and a Regional Strategy Group. Whilst between them they have a sound basis for NRM, they are also exploring further opportunities for strategic linkages and the possibility of collaborating in establishing a whole-of-catchment trust.

The Queensland experience is that the ICM approach facilitates ownership of issues, allows stakeholders to get together, promotes sharing of resources, helps build consensus and allows an integrated NRM approach. It works at three different levels, by:

- promoting and coordinating the groups doing rehabilitation, protection or restoration works and ensuring that onground actions are undertaken in strategic priority areas;
- involving Local Governments by providing a community representative forum with input to Local Government planning; and
- conducting awareness raising and education within the general community.

Recent trends and issues impacting on catchment management

In Queensland, as in other States, there are changing conditions affecting the arrangements for catchment management. Queensland is implementing water reforms and is increasingly required to meet environmental standards such as national water quality objectives. In addition, some Government structures are being revised. The Environmental Protection Agency has been established, with responsibilities for waterways planning and water quality, and the Parks and Wildlife Service has been restructured, with an expanded role in community-based nature conservation.

For community groups, there is an evolving focus on the implementation of catchment management plans which have been developed over the last few years. Groups are also recognising the need for more capacity and resources to respond to the growing emphasis on local stewardship of resources, and to take advantage of advances in information management.

Through dialogue with stakeholders, the Queensland Government has identified some key factors impacting on the future approach for catchment management:

- increasing community and Government awareness of deteriorating trends in the condition of natural resources;
- recognition of the integrated nature and complexity of many natural resource issues;
- the downsizing of government bureaucracies, with a trend towards local management of natural resources;
- the need to link catchment and NRM planning more effectively into regional planning frameworks;
- varying levels of understanding, awareness and ownership of the concept of catchment management across the State;
- confusion and in some areas, friction amongst stakeholders in the Landcare movement and the catchment management approach;

- the need for a clear focus or issue, to bring the community together to address catchment management;
- the lack of continuity and certainty in the system of three-year funding cycles;
- rapidly growing numbers and types of NRM groups and approaches;
- greater demands on communities, but a declining volunteer base; and
- growing expectations by community volunteers that they should be reimbursed for involvement, travel and communication costs.

A major challenge is to direct the finite resources that are available for NRM across Queensland in a strategic way, to achieve optimum outcomes. Funding agencies are now targeting projects that will help deliver State-wide or regional goals. For example, the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) funding scheme requires funds to be directed towards strategic priorities identified in Regional Strategies. This shift to a funding approach which is focused on strategic outcomes rather than individual projects, has highlighted the need for improved communication and partnerships between NRM agencies and groups at State, regional and local levels.

It should also be recognised that ‘volunteerism’ is generally declining in the community, and many catchment groups across Australia are reporting declining levels of community involvement in local action projects. One catchment group commented that “there are a lot more people prepared to volunteer to plant trees than to be involved in the planning and coordinating that is ICM”. Community groups have reported that members of community groups can get disillusioned over the length of time it takes to prepare a catchment strategy or plan. They are often unfamiliar with strategic thinking and can feel that planning is something the Government is forcing on them.

It is the understanding of the Queensland Government that this phenomenon is reflected across Australia. Therefore, the willingness and ability of people to participate in catchment management is an issue which should be explored at a national level, as a key issue in the Inquiry into catchment management.

<p>The value of a catchment approach to the management of the environment</p>
--

Benefits of catchment management approaches

Queensland has a variety of arrangements for managing natural resource issues. A catchment management approach was introduced in 1991, and has proven to be a successful means of drawing together stakeholders who depend upon and/or contribute to a natural resource issue (such as water quality) in their catchment. Experience has shown that a key factor for success is stakeholders having a sense of ownership and responsibility for the natural resources which they value, either economically or for ‘life-style’ reasons. Effective management of resources is much more easily achieved when clear and relevant connections can be made between management problems and the values people hold for natural resources.

Catchment-based approaches are also appropriate where a natural resource problem or issue is physically related to catchment boundaries. For example, catchment-based management is often the most sensible approach to adopt in combating a weed problem, where water is the primary mode of spread of the weed. As an example, extensive planning and implementation has occurred to contain and control the declared plant parthenium weed (*Parthenium hysterophorus*) in the headwaters of the Bulloo catchment in western Queensland. Three Local Governments, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and individual landholders have come together to try and prevent further spread of this weed throughout the catchment. Resources from each of the Local Governments have been pooled for the acquisition of equipment and labour to treat the infestation.

Because of the value of such catchment-based approaches, an increasing number of catchment management plans in Queensland now contain a weed management section, and a catchment approach is being adopted in many Local Government area pest management plans. Similarly, it is increasingly recognised that a catchment approach is often appropriate for fish management, and many catchment plans are now considering fish management issues.

Alternatives to catchment-based approaches

Notwithstanding the benefits described above, it is not always feasible or practicable in Queensland to coordinate and integrate management actions across a very large area, such as a large river basin, particularly as population is sparse in many parts of the State. Whilst some issues can most effectively be managed at a whole-of-catchment level, the State Government also recognises that many catchment and NRM issues (e.g. environmental flows) are interconnected across river basins, some of which are very large in Queensland. Other issues may not have a particular relationship to, or may cross over, geographical boundaries.

A critical issue is the capacity of communities to contribute to a local management approach. Whilst a management framework based on river catchments may be logical in terms of the environmental or resource issues, it may be impractical to implement where there are inadequate 'social resources', or where a community identifies with NRM issues which cross catchment boundaries. For example, where townships sit on ridges or across borders of catchments, it may be inappropriate to break up the social catchment of the township based on river catchment units. It may be more feasible to develop management arrangements based on the social and economic capacity of the area.

Queensland's process to determine future arrangements for catchment management

Currently, the Queensland Government is engaged in dialogue with NRM stakeholders in the community, to determine the most effective boundaries or geographic units for catchment management. At this stage, it is envisaged that the final result may well be a 'patchwork' of different arrangements in different parts of the State, to suit varying levels of community capacity as well as biophysical characteristics. However, it is envisaged that whatever smaller units are ultimately adopted, these should be able to be aggregated upwards to fit within larger 'regions' (of which there are expected to be about 13 in Queensland). The larger regions will form the basis for a strategic approach to planning and targeting of funding.

In these discussions with the community, feasible possibilities being presented for the basis of NRM 'boundaries' are:

- River catchments/basins;
- Local Government boundaries;
- Regional Strategy Group boundaries;
- Regional Planning Frameworks regions (e.g. SEQ 2001 Regional Framework for Growth Management); and
- Areas defined by administrative factors (e.g. capacity to collect a sufficient levy, or existence of sufficient community capacity to participate).

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

Stakeholders in catchment management within Queensland have identified the need for best practice guidelines for catchment management in different contexts, landscapes and environments. For example, guidelines for river management could be based on 'river styles', and on different bio-regions such as tropical and sub-tropical areas.

Such guidelines could be developed at a national level and would be useful for catchments with similar key parameters which will have similar management requirements.

The Queensland Government also supports the development of a national database on water quality, incorporating data collected by the National Land and Water Resources Audit. There should be easier access to project results/raw data/interpreted data, and all government-funded studies should be made readily and publicly available on the Internet.

The roles of different stakeholders

Division of roles and responsibilities

Government agencies and community-based NRM groups share between them a wide range of functions in catchment management. Some of the important roles and functions which most stakeholders define as falling within the scope of 'catchment management' are:

- Strategic planning—establishing policy objectives, directions and legislative frameworks;
- Operational planning—specifying how policies and strategies will be implemented in management plans, action plans, and business plans;
- Priority setting—deciding how funds and resources will be allocated;
- Coordination—overseeing and aligning the activities of Government, community and industry, ensuring community-based NRM planning inputs to Government programs;
- Resource assessment—collecting, collating and analysing data;
- Implementation—delivering, purchasing or devolving services;
- Funding—managing, raising, leveraging and/or investing funds;
- Education, extension and capacity building - providing advice and technical support, developing the capacity of communities and individuals to participate and raising awareness;
- Regulation and enforcement—allocating and regulating use of natural resources, auditing outcomes, ensuring compliance with legislation; and
- Research—identifying issues and best practice, monitoring trends, providing information for decision making.

The extent to which these functions are undertaken between Government and community-based groups varies widely, and is influenced by:

- statutory responsibilities and powers;
- localised institutional arrangements;
- the historical evolution of catchment groups and their relationship with Government;
- the 'maturity' or capacity of the groups involved; and
- the availability of skills and resources to perform functions.

In Queensland, many of the functions listed above are currently 'shared' between Government and community groups. This is consistent with the worldwide trend of moving planning and service delivery away from centralised bureaucracies towards more 'grass roots' levels and local stewardship of natural resources. In this context, Queensland is addressing the challenges of:

- ensuring that Government and non-Government agencies and groups use compatible and linked processes in carrying out their functions (e.g. planning and reporting processes, data collection methodologies);
- aligning local or issue-based planning with State and regional priorities;
- making sure efforts are not duplicated, and that ‘gaps’ in service delivery between agencies are addressed;
- devolving adequate powers and resources for agencies and groups to carry out their functions; and
- allocating resources strategically between agencies and community-based NRM groups.

Role of State Governments

In Queensland, there are growing demands from some communities for a greater level of stewardship in the management of their local natural resources. Some of the larger community NRM groups have reached a level of maturity where they seek more independence from Government in the management and distribution of funds and resources.

In view of this increasing move towards devolution of responsibility to local NRM groups, it is important for Governments to clearly articulate which functions are being devolved. For example, State Governments may wish to retain a role in:

- setting overall State policy objectives, directions and legislative frameworks;
- ensuring accountability of community based groups;
- protecting broader public interests (for example, ensuring that irreversible decisions are not made without proper assessment of long term effects);
- supporting and resourcing research;
- delivering services in areas where community capacity is insufficient or where for other reasons Government policy objectives cannot be achieved; and
- setting the framework for, and regulating and allocating natural resources, monitoring resource conditions and ensuring compliance.

The State Government can also add value to community-based management by developing linkages between policy initiatives. As an example, the development of carbon offset initiatives could be done in partnership with catchment management approaches, to multiply the potential benefits for each strategy.

Another important role of Governments is to assist communities to manage their natural resources by helping to build the capacity of communities and individuals. For example, many catchment

management groups are reporting that they are finding it hard to cope with the bureaucratic demands of running an incorporated organisation, applying for grants and so on. Governments can play an important role by providing skills training, information, technology and resources to help groups develop.

Role of Local Governments

Many NRM stakeholders in Queensland have noted that there are institutional barriers to the participation and involvement of Local Governments in catchment management. A recent Queensland initiative has been undertaken by the Department of Communication, Information, Local Government, and Planning (DCILGP), to facilitate the enhancement of Local Government involvement. Funding and in-kind support has been provided by DCILGP to the Natural Heritage Trust project titled “*Incorporating Integrated Catchment Management into Local Government Planning Schemes.*” Stage 1 of this project consisted of four case studies in a variety of riverine environments across Queensland. Stage 2 of the project will involve the preparation of “*Integrated Planning Guidelines*” consistent with requirements of Queensland’s *Integrated Planning Act 1997*. The guidelines will assist Local Governments to identify and implement planning provisions to catchment issues within their planning schemes.

An important issue is that Desired Environmental Outcomes and Codes in Planning Schemes covering catchment management issues will need to be rigorous enough to uphold council planning decisions if challenged in court. This issue highlights the value of a national approach to defining environmental objectives in different settings, which can be incorporated into local planning and management.

The State Government also facilitates the integration of catchment management strategic objectives into its regional planning projects. DCILGP is the lead agency for the regional planning projects currently being undertaken in Queensland. These projects cover 92% of the Queensland population and promote the importance of addressing regional issues across catchment boundaries as well as Local Government and state agency administrative boundaries.

These initiatives reflect the importance the State Government places on the role of Local Governments and Regional Organisations of Councils in catchment planning and management.

Roles of communities, industries and individuals

In Queensland, the catchment management approach of ICM is still relatively new. Consequently, many groups have only recently completed the strategic planning stage of their evolution. However, in general, the majority of groups are now moving towards the implementation phase of their strategies. This process is highlighting many issues about the roles of communities in managing local natural resources.

Some of the key issues which are being identified are:

- resource management at the farm or property level is crucial to achieving overall catchment management objectives;
- the community increasingly expects industries to play a role in catchment management;
- the expectations being placed on communities are increasing, leading to pressure on volunteers;

- the administrative requirements placed on local groups can be onerous, and can even ‘stifle innovation’; and
- catchment management issues within urbanised catchments are quite different to rural areas, necessitating different institutional arrangements.

Planning, resourcing and implementation arrangements

Planning

There is now a high level of recognition by National, State and Local Governments, as well as community stakeholders, of the need for a strategic approach to natural resource planning. At the national level, the management of waterways could be improved by rationalising the current river and waterways program into a single river health strategy which incorporates and strengthens the National Water Quality Management Strategy. However, there must be a recognition that issues of water quality, health and values permeate almost every part of land and water management across all sectors of the community. A national approach based on river health must still be well integrated and linked with other resource management and local social, cultural, environmental and economic issues.

Consideration should also be given to consolidating Federal Government agencies into a single portfolio responsible for planning and managing natural resources.

At the State level, there is a need to identify projects that offer integrated solutions to strategic NRM and biodiversity issues. Local, State and Federal Governments need to recognise and support the implementation of Regional Strategies. This will require improved communication and structural links between community-based groups and regional planning mechanisms.

To achieve this strategic approach, there is an urgent requirement for good quality information on how natural systems work, and adequate transfer of that information to decision makers, such as catchment management groups and Landcare groups. In addition, in Queensland, the question of a statutory basis is still being addressed, with the aim of ensuring that resource management plans, such as catchment management plans and regional strategies will be effectively integrated with State, Local and regional planning objectives.

Resourcing

Resourcing catchment management activities depends on the development of equitable and effective cost-sharing arrangements between Local and State and Federal Governments, communities, agricultural industries. In discussions with stakeholders about the rapidly changing context for resourcing NRM, the Queensland Government has identified the following issues:

- community volunteers increasingly reject the assumption that they should offer their own resources to do work which is for the benefit of the whole community and/or future generations.

They expect that the Federal and State Governments to identify which actions are in the broader public interest and to require the whole community to contribute to actions which benefit them;

- community groups and Governments need to leverage more effort from the private sector to contribute to catchment management. As an example, in South-East Queensland, with its high level of residential coastal development, the construction industry makes a significant impact on environmental outcomes, and should therefore contribute to achieving catchment management objectives. Private sector organisations could be encouraged to support catchment management through, for example, more federal taxation relief and other incentives. Another option is for a national 'Catchment Challenge' program similar to the Greenhouse Challenge initiative;
- when investment is made in catchment management initiatives, it is often the case that a portion of the benefits accrues in downstream catchments and/or coastal, estuarine and offshore areas fed by the particular catchment. Therefore, in determining funding and cost-sharing arrangements, there may be a reluctance by local communities to invest through, for example, levies based on their rates, when they see the benefits accruing outside their catchment; and
- there is an opportunity for more integration between natural resource management agencies and those undertaking community development work, such as through the joint funding of coordinators.

Resourcing arrangements for research are also important in achieving catchment management objectives. In order to get the best possible results from monitoring, research and management projects, funding should be conditional on specified requirements, such as:

- projects should be cooperative – for example, involving two or more government agencies (and a non-government agency) and a CRC/university/scientific research organisation (such as CSIRO); and
- results from funded projects need to be published in a format suitable for general public readership (not just scientific papers) including the project objectives and results, and how it fits into the 'bigger picture' of catchment management.

Implementation

In the experience of the Queensland Government, community capacity is emerging as the key issue in the implementation of catchment management approaches. Changing institutional, legislative or structural arrangements is of little benefit if communities and individuals do not have sufficient capacity to participate or to implement and adopt changes in their management of local resources. For example, community-based committees are increasingly being asked by Governments to participate in the planning and management of natural resources, but they often do not have the numbers, skills, confidence or time to do so effectively.

Another issue is that the same people within a community are often being asked to participate in a plethora of Government committees within a local region. For example, in the Queensland Murray Darling region, some community stakeholders and Local Government authorities have reported to Government that they are confused by the actions of the numerous resource management groups within the area, and find it difficult to know how to become involved.

Community leadership is one aspect of community capacity which appears to be crucial in the effective local management of resources. Stakeholders in the community are increasingly telling the State Government that they require assistance to develop their leadership and facilitation skills in order to participate effectively in decision-making and to manage local groups. This assistance could be provided, for example, by training in leadership, conflict resolution, personal development and media and business skills.

There is also a need for model protocols and agreements for catchment management committees in terms of how they do business. For examples, such guidelines could deal with liaison with Local Governments, decision-making processes, standard agreements for landcare projects, agreements with State Government agencies for exchange of information, employment agreements and administrative matters such as minute-keeping.

The use of information technology is another crucial area of community capacity. To be effective, catchment management groups need the infrastructure and the skills to improve communication, retain ownership and control of information and to make effective use of systems such as GIS and Decision Support tools. Governments increasingly need to respond to the community's need for capacity-building in such areas.

It should also be recognised that the development of a catchment management strategy or plan can have many benefits in building community capacity. For example, the process can:

- focus the group on the need for a strategic approach and for rigorous scientific information on which to base decisions;
- develop group processes for decision making;
- build members' skills;
- create good relationships between scientists, the community, local and state government; and
- build social capital.

These benefits should be borne in mind in evaluating the success of implementation approaches, as well as the more obvious environmental outcomes.

Mechanisms for Monitoring, Evaluating and Reporting

The Queensland Government recognises the importance of evaluating and monitoring the success of catchment management approaches. However, it should be recognised that such approaches are a long-term strategy, and that environmental damage which has occurred over a period of perhaps 100 - 200 years cannot be reversed in 5 or 10 years. In addition, the first few years of establishment of catchment management groups are generally focussed on relationship building and planning. For this reason, the evaluation of the success of catchment management needs to take into account the

fact that many of the early benefits are intangible, but are an essential part of the catchment management process.

Therefore, if performance indicators are to be used, whether at National or State level, they should be designed to be appropriate to the particular stage of the catchment management process. For example, they could measure changes in community awareness or the level of success in getting diverse stakeholders with competing needs to function effectively as a group. At a later stage, there should be a greater emphasis on environmental performance.

Some community groups have raised the issue that reporting to local stakeholders can be more effective than reporting to the Federal Government. They have suggested a mechanism such as an annual Catchment Report Card published to the community. Some groups have also pointed out that when requirements to monitor and report are set at a national level, this can act as a barrier to groups using evaluation as a tool for improving performance. To address this issue, a national approach to devolving responsibility for auditing (using accredited processes) could be explored.

To enhance Australia's capacity to audit the performance of catchment management approaches, the option of an Environmental Commissioner at the Federal level should be explored. The role of Commissioner could be similar to the Canada and New Zealand models. There would also be value in exploring the establishment of an Australian Standard for catchment management. However, care should be taken not to increase the 'bureaucracy' or place onerous requirements on community-based groups.

Single national databases for issues such as water quality and catchment and river health are another important concept which should be explored at a national level. These should be readily accessible to all stakeholders and should include monitoring updates so that trends may be observed. The State of the Environment Reporting process warrants greater peer group input and review, and should better reflect on-the-ground realities. These processes must be adequately resourced and there should be a capacity for independent, scientific assessment.