

File No: 3961/76078
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Mr I Causley
Chair
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Causley

Thank you for your letter of 10 June 1999 to the Premier, the Hon Jim Bacon MHA, regarding the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage Inquiry into Catchment Management.

Please find attached some comments which I hope you will find helpful for your inquiry. If there are any queries, please contact Corinna Kelly on (03) 6233 6342.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. I look forward to reading the Committee's report on catchment management in Australia.

Yours sincerely

Linda Hornsey
SECRETARY
September 1999

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

INQUIRY INTO CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT IN AUSTRALIA

TASMANIAN DEVELOPMENTS

A catchment approach to land and water management was initially proposed in Tasmania as a result of the State's participation in the national workshop on integrated catchment management held in Melbourne in 1988. A State Government and industry working group developed a strategy paper for the development of Integrated catchment Management (ICM) in the State. Implementation of the strategy has been an evolutionary process which was refocussed by the formation in 1994 of the non-statutory Tasmanian Land and Water Management Council (TLWMC). This body had equal representation from senior levels of government and non-government organisations, and was well placed for very effective planning and decision-making on land and water programs. One of the prime objectives of the TLWMC was the development of an ICM framework for the State. Under the auspices of the TLWMC, guidelines for voluntary catchment management planning were prepared and published in 1997 (Attachment 1).

A paper outlining the progress with ICM programs in Tasmania, as at the end of 1997, is at Attachment 2.

An external review of the Resource Management and Planning System (RMPS) in 1996 highlighted the significance and importance of ICM in developing a more integrated approach to natural resource management in the State. The Government subsequently prepared a draft Policy on ICM. A review is currently being conducted of the State Policy framework, and the draft policy will be considered in this context.

The State's proposed new water management legislation, currently before Parliament, will be a key part of the RMPS and will make much more effective provision for catchment based water management planning through the State Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment.

Driven primarily by the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) Program, a number of municipalities and community groups have initiated catchment management or natural resource management planning processes and practices in approximately 20

catchments during the last five years. These have primarily been local catchment initiatives. There is currently no formal mechanism in place to effectively coordinate these local initiatives, establish regional priorities and provide overall coordination and evaluation of ICM within the State.

The Tasmanian Government's new initiative to develop Partnership Agreements with Local Government is providing the opportunity to address this issue. Natural resource management (NRM) has been a key issue in one of the initial partnership agreements being developed between the two levels of government. These Agreements may help to facilitate the establishment of the necessary regional structure for an effective ICM program in Tasmania.

In addition, it is expected that *Tasmania Together*, a comprehensive economic, social and environmental strategy being developed for the State, will deliver the performance indicators or benchmarks to evaluate progress.

2. THE VALUE OF A CATCHMENT APPROACH TO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Specific values of a catchment approach to the management of the environment include:

- Practical application to resource management of the natural interaction between land and water processes within whole catchments;
- With appropriate institutional structures, the facilitation of a lead role by primary producers in planning and decision making on effective land and water degradation control programs that will have direct economic impacts on their industry;
- More effective community identification with, and local/regional commitment to and ownership of, sustainable land and water management programs;
- More effective and appropriate revenue raising, resourcing and partnership funding arrangements in addition to more objective prioritisation of projects and allocation of limited resources; and
- More effective monitoring and evaluation of land and associated water degradation control programs.

The primary purpose of ICM is to ensure a holistic approach to the management of land and water on a catchment basis, provide a framework for the coordination of

decision-making across the catchment, and to facilitate effective community and industry involvement in planning and decision-making.

In order to be effective, ICM must be properly resourced, representative of all community interests and developed with a sense of community ownership to ensure its success.

At the same time it is essential to obtain a detailed profile of the river system including the environmental flow regime, carrying capacity, riparian vegetation and aquatic flora and fauna. Without such basic information ICM management plans will be incomplete.

In Tasmania, the main natural resource management problems that would be much more effectively addressed by a formal approach to catchment management include the the following:

- Soil erosion and structural decline in the State's intensive cropping areas, particularly on the rich volcanic soils in the north, and associated inflated land values which may not reflect long term land capability;
- Degraded rivers and streams, including eroding, in-filled, polluted and weed infested waterways and riparian corridors leading silted dams and estuaries;
- General river corridor problems, including unrestricted farm livestock access and weed infestations in many areas - particularly the rampant crack willow, which has totally degraded riparian habitats and increased flooding along many streams; and
- Native vegetation management in the State's lower rainfall areas, including remnant vegetation protection, arresting rural tree decline and revegetating over-cleared areas.

This improved approach to catchment management would also increase the development and implementation of individual property planning, with direct benefits from not only soil and water degradation control programs, but also enhanced progress with biodiversity improvement programs on private land.

3. BEST PRACTICE METHODS OF PREVENTING, HALTING AND REVERSING ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN CATCHMENTS, AND ACHIEVING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY.

Whilst more research is undoubtedly required on best practices for sustainably managing our land and water resources, enough is already known by farmers and

their advisers and Government agencies for an efficiently and effectively resourced program of farm and waterway management improvements to be immediately implemented. The current limited progress is not due to a lack of reliable scientific and practical knowledge. It is due to the constraints imposed by the rural economy combined with unrealistic expectations of the land in terms of productivity and, in turn, inflated land values, as well as inappropriate cost-sharing arrangements for the necessary land management changes that must occur. Present arrangements place almost the full cost burden on primary producers alone despite these very significant barriers and the very substantial regional and State-wide benefits to the community as a whole.

Taking a catchment approach to environmental management has the effect of encouraging Governments and the community to develop solutions that will stick long term and be sustainable. An example of this in Tasmania has been the recent development of a Forest Management Plan for a water supply catchment in Northern Tasmania. The outcome required protracted and careful negotiation by all stakeholders but the solution arrived at has a higher probability of being sustainable economically, socially and environmentally. The outcome required protracted and careful negotiation by all stakeholders, particularly the Local Government Authority and the wood chipping company. The plan agreed to has a long term vision and will ensure that plantation forestry and farming are carried out sustainably and the water quality and aesthetic values are protected in perpetuity.

In the recent review of the Tasmanian Forest Practices Code the recognition of catchments in forestry management was highlighted, particularly where plantation forestry is being practised and expanded.

It should be noted that without more appropriate cost sharing arrangements for improved land management practices, sustainable approaches to NRM are much more readily achieved in the forest industries than in agriculture. This is due to the significant differences between these two industries in the relative impacts on production costs and enterprise returns, arising from the adoption of modern best practice for land and vegetation management for the two industries: the immediate financial disincentives associated with the adoption of best practice are far greater, in relative terms, in agriculture than in forest industries. There is a need to recognise this, and also the substantial public benefits, in establishing these improved funding arrangements for the adoption of sustainable agricultural land management practices, both for the protection of the State's critical soil and water resources and for enhanced biodiversity on agricultural land.

Another focus of environmental management in Tasmania is Rivercare. The benefit of taking a catchment approach has been realised and is being promoted. Implementing Rivercare works in the context of a catchment or whole river length raises the probability that those works will be effective long term. It is also well

established that unsustainable land use produces unsustainable impacts on our rivers, further underscoring the value of, and the necessity for, a catchment approach to jointly managing these components of the landscape.

4. THE ROLE OF DIFFERENT LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT, THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND THE COMMUNITY IN MANAGEMENT OF CATCHMENT AREAS.

State Government has a role to play in setting State-wide policies and strategies for natural resource management that can be applied and incorporated into catchment management plans. State Government also has a lead role, with other major stakeholders, in developing the strategic framework and structures within which ICM will occur.

Both State and Local Government have a role in the coordination and facilitation of land and water management both within catchments and between catchments (regional). They also have a role in the monitoring and evaluation of ICM as well as keeping abreast of and up to date with initiatives related to NRM and catchment management in other States and overseas.

In several municipalities in Tasmania, the councils are already managing their natural resources on a catchment basis. That is, catchments are the primary units or divisions within the municipality for purposes of planning and management of natural resources. The councils have sourced external funding to employ catchment coordinators in priority catchments, and these coordinators are working with Government, industry and community groups to develop NRM plans for each catchment specifying issues for action.

Catchment landowners and land managers are major stakeholders and have a significant role in the on-ground implementation of catchment management plans. As such they need to be fully involved in the process of catchment management planning and implementation. Both the community and the private sector are also major stakeholders and need to be involved in the process.

5. PLANNING, RESOURCING, IMPLEMENTATION, CO-ORDINATION AND CO-OPERATION IN CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT.

The State Government has a key role to play in the planning, coordination and implementation of catchment management in the State. The Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment (DPIWE) employs a full-time catchment officer who facilitates NRM within catchments. There are eight water management officers funded by the State who manage the water resources on a catchment basis within

their region. Those water management officers will be pivotal in implementing the State's new water legislation.

Environmental flows are being determined for specified and prioritised water courses within catchments.

The DPIWE is implementing the State Policy on Water Quality Management, and is currently determining Protected Environmental Values for surface and ground waters within catchments.

Local Government Authorities are playing an increasing role in coordination of catchment management and natural resource management. In several instances councils are the host organisations for NRM staff funded by the Federal Government. Some councils have endorsed catchment management plans and referred to them in their statutory plans.

6. 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 A REVIEW AND IMPROVEMENT.

Currently there is no formal and uniform reporting/evaluation process for catchment management programs. There is an evaluation process for programs funded by NHT. It is envisaged that when the performance indicators or benchmarks relating to the environment aspects of *Tasmania Together* are introduced, they will provide for a regular evaluation of catchment programs. In addition, catchment programs will be reported on every five years in the State of Environment Reports, as will a progress report on ICM generally in the State.
