

30th July, 1999

The Secretary
House of Representative Standing Committee
on Environment and Heritage
Parliament House
CANBERRA. ACT. 2600.

Dear Sirs,

CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

The following submission is made on behalf of the Jordan River Catchment Committee who are currently in the process of developing a management plan to improve the overall water quality and quantity within the river catchment to benefit the health of the Brighton community.

The Jordan River is one of the larger rivers in Tasmania with its source in the Midlands district near the town of Oatlands and a mouth in the Hobart metropolitan suburbs of Bridgewater/Gagebrook. The river flows through a total catchment involved from farming to higher density urban development, it is heavily used for its irrigation water source and in its upper reaches has become intermittent in its flow.

The catchment has been a focus of many studies because of its poor health and increasing demands, NHT funds have provided an opportunity to collect relevant data and to model the river to establish the variables on which the community is so dependent.

The inquiry covers a number of issues and the following commentary is made for your record.

1. Catchment Management in Australia

With the exception of the major river systems on the mainland catchment management has only recently developed as a concept of environmental importance.

Tasmania had little knowledge of the approach five years ago although monitoring of river systems as part of the State of Environment was recognised as a valuable tool for measuring community health. River systems had become either urban stormwater channels or an open ended source of irrigation water.

Overall management of the catchment was not seen as a resource issue.

The advent of funding under NHT and an appreciation of the approach in Victoria and Queensland of catchment management saw a marked change in understanding of the river dynamics and outputs.

The approaches to catchment management in Tasmania are many and varied and have relied heavily on the expectations of stakeholders. A search for a process within Australia which might be considered as uniform towards catchment management has also proven unsuccessful. Queensland appears to be the State nearest that aspect.

At the same time it might be an outcome that uniformity is not necessarily essential. That is certainly the experience of Tasmania.

2. Value of a Catchment approach to Management

The overall outputs of an approach to a catchment in a holistic manner is to some degree the only mechanism by which all environmental outcomes can be measured and evaluated. The Jordan River for example has a very diverse range of land uses and demands placed on its resources over a distance of some 120 kms. Without an overall catchment approach practices which are undertaken in upper reaches of the river have a direct and limiting affect down stream.

This may be derived for example from drawing down water for irrigation reducing volumes further downstream through to management practices which may significantly increase nutrients and potential for algae blooms. In the urban areas this may directly impact on public health matters.

Our experience to date has been to involve representatives from all sections of the catchment as stakeholders and to collect data on a catchment wide basis. Indeed the model being prepared by consultants reflects the total catchment with an ability to segment localised impacts where necessary.

Without an overall catchment approach the outcome of local on-ground works can have a major impact on other users – generally downstream. At the same time the only way in which an understanding of the individual river system is to look at its total catchment.

3. Best Practice Methods

At this point in the development of the Jordan River Management Plan there has been an identification of issues but not a development of action plans. Best practice will be essential to be applied in the overall catchment context in terms of the overall planning for the river, as well as individual land management practices by stakeholder owners.

The Catchment Committee is currently developing a vision for the catchment which will set values for the longer term management and sustainability of all resources. There is

need to have outcomes which are balanced, accepted and implemented utilising best environmental approaches.

4. Role of Public and Private Sector

The approach to catchment management is a partnership arrangement if a successful and sustaining management of the catchment is to be achieved.

Whilst ownership of the plan may be at the local level with landowners along the catchment drainage there is invariably need for professional guidance to achieve sustainable outcomes which must be provided from Government sources. Present research has been initiated generally by State Government agencies and resourced through the Federal Government notably NHT funding. The achievements of these partnership arrangements have been widespread throughout Australia and a reflection of the confidence of the public sector to achieve and improved catchment (s) environment.

It would be hoped that such an arrangement could be established for at least the next decade to enable practical results to be achieved. The community will continue to manage these plans at the local level however it would be naïve to think that a continued assistance both professionally and financially would not be essential.

5. Planning and Resources

The benefits of NHT funding have been evidenced in the catchment management plans being developed and the improvements being delivered on-ground. The model to give the catchment plans local ownership will enable the plans to have a life through local resources although in the main this will not ensure that they will be successful.

Resources from the public sector at all levels of Government will need to embrace the catchment management approach –such resource being either professional or financial. Perhaps the problem may be in the magnitude of some of the issues to be resolved which is beyond the resource of the local community.

In an ideal world the continuation of the NHT style of Commonwealth funding for both plan preparation and on-ground works will result in an overall environmental standard of health being achieved in the catchments.

6. Monitoring Catchment Management Programs.

At the individual catchment level preparation of programs and their evaluation will be an on-going process to ensure the objectives and results to be achieved are met. The achievement of an overnight improvement will not be gained, it has taken many years to degrade the catchments and just as many years (if not more) to reverse the problems.

State of Environment reports provide an effective mechanism to monitor the outcomes however it is dependent on the time interval of review and the extent of the resources

available to be able to report on the environmental standards. Brighton Council is one of the few local government agencies to produce such a State of Environment report that includes commentary on the Jordan River lower catchment.

An overall perspective of this catchment is currently being completed by the State Government under an NHT grant. This require 3 years of data collection and reporting, however the specific item in relation to improvement to public health from the catchment management approach is yet to be incorporated in that approach.

In summary we believe that there is considerable value in using the catchment management approach particularly if it has local ownership and can continue to be supported by professional and financial assistance from the public sector agencies.

Yours Faithfully,
MICHAEL SHIELD & ASSOCIATES

Michael Shield F.R.A.P.I.
Director