

**House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage**

**Submission to the
Inquiry into Catchment Management**

**Prepared by the
Mount Lofty Ranges Catchment Program**



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1. The Development of Catchment Management in Australia

The Mount Lofty Ranges region is one of South Australia's most important natural and economic areas in that it:

- produces over \$240 million of farm gate value in agricultural produce
- supplies over 60% of Adelaide's water
- is a prime tourism and recreation area for South Australia
- provides housing for a population of over 85 000
- contains considerable areas of diverse native vegetation (forests, grasslands and wetlands) with many rare and endangered species of fauna and flora
- contains important historical features and other cultural assets.

There are many development pressures in the region:

- from the expansion of metropolitan Adelaide and the use of more and more agricultural and environmentally sensitive land for housing and urban infrastructure
- from those seeking land on which to pursue a rural lifestyle within commuting distance from Adelaide
- from pollution which increasingly contaminates water run-off and degrades the quality of water from the regions water catchments
- to make more wide-spread use of the Region's natural and cultural heritage and special landscape qualities for the tourism and recreation industry
- to maintain the viability of horticultural and broad-scale agricultural pursuits and to expand irrigated horticulture in view of the temperate climate, high rainfall and fertile soils.

Significant degradation of the natural resources on the region and growing conflicts between competing land uses, triggered the preparation of a Regional Strategy Plan for the Ranges which was completed in February 1993. The Mount Lofty Ranges Catchment Program (MLRCP) was developed to provide collaborative (now integrated) natural resource management, a key feature of the Regional Strategy, and was funded from the Healthy Catchments Component of the National Landcare Program. From an early stage, the MLRCP was recognised as a national model for the implementation of natural resource management on a regional scale, involving the cooperative efforts of all levels of government and the community.

The Program has taken an innovative approach to resolving significant environmental issues with a strong emphasis of encouraging community ownership of problems and a commitment to collaborative remedial action.

Following an evaluation of the Catchment Program 1993 to 1997, Stage 11 for the MLRCP was developed for 1998-2000. Most of this submission relates to the second phase of the Program.

2. The Value of a Catchment Approach to the Management of the Environment

Everyone lives in a catchment. A catchment approach enables communities to work together in as small or as large an areas as they like. It also provides a mechanism for linking residents and landholders who are up-stream and/or down-stream and to consider the implications of their actions. This is particularly important in Adelaide, where the Mount Lofty Ranges provides the water supply for a city of 1 million.

A catchment approach also enables a 'whole of landscape' approach, incorporating both the natural resource management issues as well as the 'people' issues such as the presence (or absence) of a catchment or environment group.

Within the current boundaries of the MLRCP (an area 5 350 sq km) there are about several large catchments (draining to the west, the Gawler River, Torrens, Patawalonga, Onkaparinga, Myponga and southern Fleurieu catchments and draining to the east the Marne-Saunders, Bremer Barker, Angas, Tookayerta etc) but within these large catchment there may be several sub-catchments. The Torrens for example, which starts near Mount Pleasant 55 km east of Adelaide, in addition to the main channel, has 10 sub-catchments before it reaches Adelaide.

One of these sub-catchments, Sixth Creek is the largest of the River Torrens system. It has 43% of its area covered in native vegetation, and thus contains the largest percentage of remnant native vegetation in the Mount Lofty Ranges. Sixth Creek also has a very active catchment group which has successfully gained funding from the Torrens Catchment Water Management Board to assist in the preparation of a catchment plan in 1998 and funding from the MLRCP major on-ground works budget to implement that plan in 1999-2000.

This Sixth Creek project will deliver on-ground works across 6 600 ha starting at 44 sites. It is a whole-of-landscape project that is addressing sustainable agricultural productivity, biodiversity decline, water, soil and riparian zone quality issues, and includes educational and monitoring components. On-ground change includes:

- 8.6 km of fencing to protect riparian areas
- 5.7 km of fencing and management which will protect and restore 263 ha of native vegetation
- 25 ha of revegetation.

There is very strong community and government support with partnerships with the Adelaide Hills Council, Torrens Catchment Water Management Board, Forestry SA, Country Fire Service, PIRSA, DEHAA, Animal and Plant Control Board, Friends and Landcare Groups.

3. Best Practice Methods of Preventing, Halting and Reversing Environmental Degradation in Catchments and Achieving Environmental Sustainability

As stated above, the MLRCP began in 1993 as a cooperative approach between the community and the Federal, State and Local Governments to improve land management throughout the Ranges through the National Landcare Program.

The main achievements of the first phase of the Program (1993-1997) were:

- institutional changes (real partnerships between State agencies, and with local government)
- increased awareness and understanding of natural resource issues in the Ranges
- on-ground activities, such as riparian zone management
- over 60 grants to community groups
- Local Government Component
- National Landcare Program funding of \$3.8 million and \$5.1 million from State, Local Government and the community.

The second phase, the Mount Lofty Ranges Catchment Program 1998-2000, aims to accelerate on-ground action towards the sustainable use and development of the natural resources of the ranges, in line with the recommendations of the Mount Lofty Ranges Regional Strategy Plan. Activities are funded jointly by the community and Local, State and Federal Governments, using Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) funds.

The Program is achieving on-ground change through an integrated approach involving the community and all levels of government by:

1. assisting the community to develop and implement on-ground projects
2. providing funds for on-ground action for priority issues and locations
3. providing technical advice for on-ground action
4. raising community awareness, understanding and responsibility for natural resource management.

In the first 12 months (January 1998 to January 1999) the following has been achieved.

- Development of strong **partnerships** with Soil Conservation Boards, Local Government, PIRSA Rural Solutions, Catchment Water Management Boards and other landholder or natural resource management groups.
- **On-ground outputs** such as:
 - 300 ha of existing vegetation/habitat protected

- 300 ha of revegetation with local native species by natural regeneration and direct seeding
 - over 170 km of fencing to protect existing and/or new native vegetation
 - 25km of watercourse fenced and revegetated
 - over 130 ha of planting in recharge areas
 - over 1 700 ha where grazing pressure controlled.
- 27 **grants** under \$10 000 given to **community groups** to undertake on-ground projects such as conducting a full road reserve biodiversity survey, of which the last 13 were assessed and funded jointly with the Onkaparinga Catchment Water Management Board.
 - Over 600 properties Involved in **educational activities** such as land management and property planning courses, field days and farm walks leading to a substantial increase in sustainable land management throughout the region.
 - **Support** provided to **land management groups** in the Mount Lofty Ranges by providing information, referral to training and technical advice, advice on planning and coordination of activities and projects.
 - The re-formation of a **Local Government Steering Committee**, involving all 10 Councils in the Ranges, to focus collectively on sustainable agriculture, water resources and nature conservation.
 - A major review of existing **Local Action Plans** and other natural resource management plans in the region undertaken.
 - Current status of the **Local Agenda 21** process in each of the 10 Councils in the region documented and reviewed.
 - **Monitoring and evaluation** strategy for each subprogram and the Program as a whole developed and implemented.
 - Development of a **regional revegetation strategy** for the Mount Lofty Ranges managed.
 - Input provided to the **update** of the Mount Lofty Regional Strategy Plan.
 - Direct **participation** of 60 local government, community, State Government other groups and over 1 500 individuals in various aspects of the Program.

Assuming continued Natural Heritage Trust funding in 1999-2000, the Program will deliver

- On-ground works including:
 - 1 755 ha of vegetation outcomes, such as conserving remnant vegetation, conserving wildlife habitat, and integrating native vegetation into mainstream farming
 - 2700 ha of `landcare' outcomes, such as widespread adoption of sustainable natural resource management practices and fencing to ensure land and water resources are used within their capacity
 - 175 km of `river' outcomes, such as improved water quality and ecological health and best management practices which integrate rural land use activities.
- About 60 grants to community groups to undertake on-ground works.
- On-ground works undertaken by 500 landholders in the Mount Lofty Ranges as a result of their increased skills, commitment and knowledge.
- Strengthened involvement by local government, particularly through the Local Agenda 21 process, with its emphasis on accelerated adoption and implementation of sustainability.
- An improved community approach to integrated and coordinated natural resource management through the Landcare support project.
- A Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Committee which provides strategic direction, determines regional priorities and provides an integrated approach to natural resource management in the region.

Key elements in the success of the Program include the following.

- The strength of the partnerships which underpin every aspect of the Program (see section 5.4).
- Through these partnerships – and the requirement for matching contributions for NHT investment – the ability to attract additional investment for natural resource management in the region at the ratio of 1.4:1.
- The establishment of Catchment/Natural Resource Centres with the co-location of state agency and community funded staff, which have resulted in the development of further partnerships and a level of cooperation and coordination not seen previously.
- A logical progression from Phase 1 which concentrated on community awareness and understanding of natural resource management, to Phase 11 with its concentration on on-ground change. For example, in the first half of 1999, community groups able were encouraged to apply for funding

for major on-ground works up to \$150 000, to address priority issues in their location.

- Community grants which were first offered in 1994 and intended to overcome some of the criticisms of the annual funding cycle of the (then) National Landcare Program. These grants enable community groups to access funding by a continuous application process, a rapid decision and speedy access to funds. They are now offered on a quarterly basis, in partnership with the Onkaparinga Catchment Water Management Board.
- Effective communication strategies, including newsletters, local and regional media coverage, Enviro Tours for the general public, Web site, quality publications, etc.
- A philosophy of 'picking winners' (such as community groups or landholders) and making their achievements accessible/visible to the community and wider public (as well as to funders and stakeholders).
- A Program which is managed by a Ministerially-appointed Board of Management with a balance of community, local government and State agencies, with an independent Chairperson.

4. The Role of Different Levels of Government, the Private Sector and the Community in the Management of Catchment Areas

Within the MLRCP, the Federal Government provides funding (from NHT) and guidance on overall direction/outcomes (eg total emphasis on on-ground works for Bushcare funds). Section 5.2 provides details of the funding contributions.

The State Government, particularly Primary Industries and Resources South Australia (PIRSA) and Department of Environment, Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs (DEHAA) provides some funding (eg to operate the Mount Lofty Ranges Catchment Centre at Mount Barker), management expertise, administrative support (particularly from PIRSA), technical expertise by locating staff at the Catchment Centre and elsewhere. Planning SA And SA Water provide some sponsorship dollars and input into the Board.

Local Government has re-established a MLRCP Local Government Steering committee involving all 10 councils within the MLRCP region. (In the first phase of the Program, there were two separate Steering Committees; one for the Central and Northern Hills, and one for the Southern Hills.) They provide 'in-kind' assistance and manage the local government component particularly Local Action Planning, Local Agenda 21 and community-based natural resource centres.

The private sector provides 'in-kind' support, eg to distribute information about land management courses, and sponsorship of individual projects such as a

calendar, or a book reprint. There is potential to increase the involvement of this sector.

Community members are a major component of the Board of Management and community groups/landholders apply or and receive funding to implement community projects and on-ground works. Early in 1998, a partnership was developed with three Hills Soil Conservation Boards to implement a land management program (see section 5.1).

5. Planning, Resourcing, Implementation, Co-ordination and Co-operation in Catchment Management

This is a major challenge with a program as large and complex as the MLRCP.

5.1 Planning

Most of the planning is carried out as part of the annual cycle of NHT applications. Activities and expected outcomes for each of five subprograms are developed with the co-ordinators in those programs and then combined with the Program management and regional initiative to set out the overall direction for the funding period in question. Special Board meetings are held to consider and refine drafts. The five subprograms and their project aims are as follows..

(i) Community Involvement Grants

These aim to encourage the community to participate in projects and activities which:

- enhance and protect the quality of surface and ground water
- ensure sustainable use and management of water resources
- protect and enhance the nature and quality of biodiversity
- conserve remnant vegetation and/or revegetation
- provide for the sustainable management of land and the protection of the soil
- increase community understanding of natural resources management.

(ii) On-ground works

These aim to achieve major on-ground change by coordinated activities which address one or more of the following:

- enhance and protect the quality of surface and ground water
- ensure sustainable use and management of water resources
- protect and enhance the nature and quality of biodiversity
- conserve remnant vegetation and/or revegetation
- provide for the sustainable management of land and the protection of the soil
- increase landholder understanding of natural resources management.

(iii) Land Management Program

This aims to enhance the adoption of sustainable land management and land use practices in the Mt Lofty Ranges by raising the level of awareness, understanding and skills, and thus the standard of property management, amongst holders of small rural properties.

(iv) Local Government Component

This aims to:

- coordinate and facilitate the development of local action plans to set priorities for on-ground works
- accelerate the development of the LA 21 process by the Councils involved in the Catchment Program to deliver :
 - new and expanded activities by local government in natural resource management,
 - protection and enhancement of water quality,
 - the long term viability of agriculture,
 - conservation of existing native vegetation and continuation of revegetation initiatives,
 - sustainable economic development whilst maintaining and enhancing scenic amenity.
- enhance a whole-of-government/whole-of-community approach to integrated and coordinated action in resource management
- assist in raising community awareness and understanding of natural resource management issues and remedial actions
- support local government's responsibilities in natural resource management.

(v) Landcare Support Project

This aims to enhance the adoption of sustainable land management practices by contributing to the effective operation of landcare, catchment and other land management groups (eg "Friends of" groups)

5.2 Resourcing

Program activities are funded jointly by the community and the Local, State and Commonwealth Governments. This came to a total of \$5.72 million during 1998/99.

The Commonwealth contribution is provided as a grant from the Natural Heritage Trust through the National Landcare, Rivercare and Bushcare Programs. In 1998/99 the NHT is providing \$1.95 million (34% of the total).

Combined funding from the community and the State and local Governments is \$3.77 million.

Community contribution is through labour and other 'in-kind' support and through matching funding for all on-ground works projects. The total contribution from the community and local government is valued at \$2.53 million in 1998-99 (44% of the total).

State and Local Government contribution is made primarily through technical and administrative support. State Government also pays the full cost of operating the Catchment Centre at Mount Barker. The State contribution is valued at \$1.24 million in 1998-99 (22% of the total).

Program staff are either funded from NHT or the State Government as part of the State's contribution. For example, each major on-ground works project has a 'link' person to assist the group with the funding application, the establishment and operation of a steering group to oversee the actual implementation of the works.

MRLCP staff directly funded by NHT include a Leader, Technical Manager, two administration officers, two Landcare officers, three part-time education coordinators, two small property management advisers, one local government component coordinator and two Local Agenda 21 project officers.

5.3 Co-ordination

The MLRCP is managed by a community-based Board of Management with members appointed by two State Ministers for their expertise in a range of relevant natural resource management issues in the region. All major partners are voting members on the Board, namely Local Government, Soil Boards, the community and State government agencies of PIRSA, DEHAA. Representation from the Catchment Water Management Boards is being addressed. The Board has an independent Chairperson.

Program staff consist of a Leader, Technical Manager and two administration officers to assist with co-ordination.

Each subprogram has its own co-ordination strategy. For example, Local Government coordinates its activities through a Local Government Steering committee, and the Chair of that Committee is a member of the Board of Management.

Coordination and communication is assisted by regular Catchment Centre staff and wider team meetings.

5.4 Co-operation

There is a very strong emphasis on co-operation, with a commitment to collaborative action from all levels of government and the community. This was reinforced by the Commonwealth-South Australia Partnership Agreement¹ of August 1997, where a Regional Initiative in the Mount Lofty Ranges is to *'support the continuing development of the Catchment Management Program as a national model in integrated natural resource management as a partnership between the community, state agencies and local government.'*

This co-operation is best demonstrated by the partnerships which manage and implement each subprogram, namely:

- Community involvement grants (partnership with Onkaparinga Catchment Water Management Board)
- Pilot and major on-ground activities (various partnerships with landholder groups)
- Land Management Program (partnership with three Hills Soil Conservation Boards)
- Landcare Support Project (partnership with PIRSA Rural Solutions)
- Local Government Component (partnership with 10 Councils).

¹ Addressing jointly agreed natural heritage objectives and the provision of financial assistance under the Natural Heritage Trust of Australia Reserve and related programs.

Other examples of co-operation include the partnership with PIRSA Rural Solutions to develop a regional revegetation framework for the Mount Lofty Ranges and with PIRSA Regional Strategies to manage one of the eight on-ground activities funded under the project 'Accelerating regional implementation of NHT in South Australia'.

Progressively since 1995 and now required under the Water Resources Act 1997, five Catchment Water Management Boards (CWMBs) have been established in the Mount Lofty Ranges, whose boundaries overlap with the Mount Lofty Ranges Catchment Program. These CWMBs are

- Northern Adelaide and Barossa
- Torrens
- Patawalonga
- Onkaparinga
- River Murray.
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The MLRCP is moving to establish further partnerships with these Catchment Water Management Boards, to build on existing working relationships with the Torrens CWMB on joint funding allocations and with the Onkaparinga CWMB on community involvement grants.

An implementation example of co-operation is provided by the Milang Area Land Management Project, one of four sub-catchments targeted for on-ground work in 1998. The area was designated an 'Hot-Spot' for action by the Goolwa to Wellington Local Action Planning Committee. An on-ground action project was developed with the committee to tackle the problems and increase productivity. Implementation involves 12 landholders, the Goolwa to Wellington LAP Project Officer, MLRCP Staff, two schools, the Progress Association and a scout group. These on-ground works funded by MLRCP (protecting native vegetation, fencing and protecting sand dunes, planting permanent pasture, fodder shrubs, native vegetation and wind breaks, and rehabilitating salt land) complement the conservation farming techniques applied by landholders (eg reduced tillage, stubble retention)..

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 Review and Improvement

6.1 Monitoring

Monitoring is a fundamental part of the Program, with each subprogram monitored, as well as the Program as a whole. For example:

- Community Involvement Grants for projects under \$10 000 are monitored at 2 and 9 months, with a completion report part of the funding agreement between the group and the MLRCP. Where appropriate, physical outputs are monitored (eg km's of fencing, ha of revegetation).
- Pilot and on-ground works are monitored at 3, 6 and 12 months for timeliness, landholder involvement, implementation and accountability. A completion report is also required, on both outputs (eg area of pasture renovation) and outcomes (eg soil quality).

- The Land Management Program is monitored at three levels with a Board subcommittee investigating milestones and outcomes, surveys of participants every 6 months to measure the impact of the Program, and feed-back from participants in special events such as field days, farm walks.
- The Local Government Component and Landcare Support Project Advisory Committee provide regular reports to the Board.

6.2 Evaluation, Review and Reporting

A comprehensive evaluation of the Mount Lofty Ranges Catchment Program 1993 – 1997 was undertaken in 1997. Its executive summary states:

Overall the Mount Lofty Ranges Catchment Program has had a significant positive influence of natural resource management in the Ranges over the past four years by facilitating major changes in institutional arrangements for the delivery of natural resource management services, by encouraging the application of land capability to land use and management decision making and by providing information, advice and funding to assist in natural resource rehabilitation projects.

A mid term review is currently underway (half way through Phase 11) which is investigating value for money, impact, access, Program delivery against aims and objectives, relevance of MLRCP to community and local government and how it fits with State Programs.

At the end of the Program a comprehensive evaluation will again be undertaken, to include independent qualitative and quantitative assessment of the effectiveness of the Program and its role in achieving on-ground change. This completion report will be widely available.

6.3 The Use of these Reports for State of the Environment Reporting

A position paper recently circulated for public comment by SOE Reporting in South Australia `Environmental Performance Measures. Signposts to the Future' outlines the condition indicators for atmosphere, inland waters, estuaries and the seas, land, biodiversity, and human settlements. There is potential to use some of the data collected on MLRCP-funded projects to some of these condition indicators, such as the area of and affected by acidic soils or by salinity. Action will be undertaken to explore these possibilities with the SOE Working Group.

References

Department for Environment Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs (1999) *Environment Performance Measures -Signposts to the Future. Position Paper for Public Comment*. DEHAA, Adelaide.

Department of Housing and Urban Development (1993) *Mount Lofty Ranges Regional Strategy Plan*. DHUD, Adelaide

Mount Lofty Ranges Catchment Program brochure (1999)

Mount Lofty Ranges Catchment Program Board (1997) *Completion Report 1993 – 1997*, Mount Lofty Ranges Catchment Centre, Mount Barker, SA

Partnership Agreement (1997) between the Commonwealth of Australia and South Australia. Addressing jointly agreed natural heritage objectives and the provision of financial assistance under the Natural Heritage Trust of Australia Reserve and related programs.

For further information, see the newly established web site:

www.mlrcp.sa.gov.au