

Submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage Inquiry into Catchment Management

From the Woody Yaloak Catchment Group

Key points:

- Financial support to meet the increasing reporting requirements. *We believe this is currently inadequate.*
- Insufficient facilitator support to ensure maximum learning and motivation is gained from the on ground works. *It seems opportunities to improve the skills, confidence and therefore motivation of landholders is being missed.*
- Lack of integration between programs. *In the future there must be more provision for funding sources to jointly support integrated projects.*

Background:

The Alcoa Woody Yaloak Catchment Group has been operating since 1992 and covers an area of 120,000 ha and is located south west of Ballarat in Victoria. It is home to 150 full time and 70 part time farmers. It is a group comprising seven landcare groups.

Woody Yaloak was Victoria's first community based catchment project to gain significant private sponsorship. Since 1992 Alcoa of Australia Ltd have invested more than \$ 550,000 in the project with State and Commonwealth agencies contributing a further \$200,000. This has been matched by more than \$2.7 million provided by landholders.

Considerable on ground change has been achieved, with hundreds of hectares of trees planted, rabbit and weeds eradicated, erosion checked and pastures improved. Participation rates are at 70 per cent. We have long term experience in landholder based catchment management.

Our submission to the Inquiry relates to three issues:

- Insufficient financial support to meet the increasing reporting requirements
- Insufficient facilitator support to ensure maximum learning and motivation is gained from the on ground works.
- Lack of integration between programs

1. Insufficient financial support to meet the increasing reporting requirements

Since 1992 the reporting requirements of State and Federal supported projects has increased. Woody Yaloak current deals with approximately \$200,000 of funds for on ground works from five or six different programs. Last year we had to adopt an electronic cashbook system to track the myriad of financial payments we make. It has now become a specialist job, well beyond the capacity of our volunteer group. We employ a project officer (funded by a voluntary levy paid by all participating landholders in the project) to support the project but are finding more of his time is being taken up servicing the administrative / reporting requirements of the funding bodies than servicing our members.

The Woody Yaloak Catchment Group is **not** arguing the level of reporting is unfair. It is necessary for all groups to be accountable for the monies they receive. However we believe there should be sufficient funds attached to each project (when approved) to cover this reporting requirement. We believe this is currently inadequate.

2. Insufficient facilitator support to ensure maximum learning and motivation is gained from the on ground works

During the past seven years the Alcoa Woody Yaloak project has instigated over 550 projects dealing with tree planting, farm planning, weed, vermin and erosion control and pasture improvement. The knowledge gained by these activities is enormous. However we are having real difficulty extracting the learning from these activities simply because we don't have the facilitation support to arrange group inspections and field days. Because of the Alcoa sponsorship, along with State and Commonwealth funding, we are fortunate in having enough money to provide incentives to undertake on ground works. Yet we cannot match this on groundwork with complementary facilitation support to extract the sharing and learning. It seems to us that opportunities to improve the skills, confidence and therefore motivation of landholders are going to waste.

We have applied on many occasions just for facilitation support to match our on ground money. In all cases we have been unsuccessful (and in fact some comments have been received to suggest if we wanted facilitation support we need to apply for more on ground money as well). This seems a ludicrous situation to us.

The Woody Yaloak Catchment Group is well aware of the criticism levelled at the Federal Government in the early 90's that too much money was going into people and not on ground works. However we believe the pendulum has now swung too far. If our group is any example we are wasting opportunities to enhance landholder skills, understanding and therefore motivation. The frustration within our catchment group is obvious. We are more than capable of dispersing funds, but what about the lost learning opportunities?

3. Lack of integration between programs

The Alcoa Woody Yaloak Catchment project has the catchphrase of Productive Catchment Management. We see conservation and productivity going hand in hand. Profit supports long-term investments in landcare. Yet we are constantly frustrated by the inability of funding sources to accommodate our project proposals when they attempt to achieve this integration. "Sorry outside the guidelines" is the usual comment. We are being forced to segment our activities to just tree planting or just weeds etc. Landholders integrate activities on their farms every day. Why not the funding arrangements.

We appreciate there may be administrative hurdles to overcome but the rhetoric about integrated catchment management is simply not supported by the funding process. While funding sources (eg Bushcare, NLP etc) remain as discrete entities, we believe there is no chance of achieving integration. Yet integration will be the 'driver' to achieve a more sustainable future. In the future there must be more provision for funding sources to jointly support integrated projects. It should not be the responsibility of a volunteer group to submit many applications just to achieve integrated support (all with their own reporting guidelines).

We thank you for the opportunity to raise these issues and would be happy to discuss them with the inquiry if deemed appropriate.

Alice Knight
Chairman,
Alcoa Woody Yaloak Catchment Group.

Please address all correspondence to the project officer.

Mr Cam Nicholson
32 Stevens Street
Queenscliff VIC 3225

Ph / fax (03) 5258 3860
0417 311 098