

URBAN HILLS LAND CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Steering Committee

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The Urban Hills Land Conservation District Committee submits the following to the Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage Inquiry into Catchment Management.

The submission is based on the collective experience and expertise of the Urban Hills LCDC, a community based environmental management committee actively involved in catchment management, in partnership with local government and state agencies.

1. The value of a catchment approach to the management of the environment.

A catchment approach enables an inclusive, holistic approach to be applied to management. The principles of Integrated Catchment Management (ICM) include partnership, cooperation, a systems approach, and a balanced approach (Hollick and Mitchell 1991). These principles apply to catchment planning as well as implementation, and the associated decision-making and resourcing issues.

Providing coordination through a catchment approach enables a more strategic and inclusive outcome of all components. This in turn enables the recognition of linkages between elements of the environment, the economy and the social and political arenas that are fundamental to an integrated approach. At implementation stages, the coordinated approach offered through catchment planning avoids the often costly, resource demanding and ineffective *ad hoc* approach, where the linkages and interrelationships are not recognised or addressed.

Most pro-active environmental protection and management activities are undertaken at the local government and community level, and also contribute positive outcomes toward the health of the catchments.

2. The training and education requirements of local government:

It is clearly recognised that local government is well placed to deliver positive outcomes at both the local and regional level, through strategic policy development and implementation. Local Government, however, is traditionally outside of the environmental arena, and though progress has been considerable in many localities and regions, the support for the required institutional and cultural change needs to be put into place. Training and education of elected members of local government is identified at various forums regularly as a necessity to overcoming barriers to catchment management and environmental issues becoming core business for local government.

Institutional and cultural change is occurring, but it is often being driven by the community and not well integrated into council decision-making.

3. The role of different levels of government, the private sector and the community in the management of catchment areas:

Local government offers the most appropriate level of government in dealing with environmental management, including catchment management. Local government operates most closely at the level where on-ground implementation occurs, and is able to achieve the most effective results, especially in partnership with the community and other agencies. The Federal and State levels of government need to recognise, and contribute funding to local government which has the primary environmental management role and is in the best position to deliver strategic and on-ground outcomes.

The expectation that local government (and regional organisations such as the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council) are responsible and should fund future catchment management is unrealistic under the current funding arrangements and pressures faced by local government. In the context of ICM, a partnership approach and the development of an agreed (long-term) funding arrangement between the levels of government and the community would be most appropriate.

Planning, resourcing, implementation, coordination and cooperation in catchment management:

The issues of planning, resourcing, implementation, coordination and cooperation in catchment management relate to the levels of resource requirements for the various phases of catchment management. It is essential that all levels of government recognise that community groups and their capabilities are not an infinite resource. Successful catchment management is based upon the involvement of the community, essentially on a voluntary basis, and many aspects of catchment management are beyond the capacity of community members due to time demands.

With catchment management being weighted towards the participation of community, and showing greatest signs of success when this is the case, then it is essential that catchment groups are supported appropriately through the provision of the necessary resources. This level of community support is best undertaken through local government with funding and resource assistance provided by the Federal and State government through on-going programs. Some appropriate mechanisms to generate funding and resource assistance include redirecting a percentage of land tax receipts; through the Metropolitan and Urban Improvement/Development Scheme; and redirecting a proportion of stamp duty on land transfers.

Catchment planning based on the concept of “ownership” is essential to the future implementation of catchment plans. Catchment groups, representative of community and government should be fully involved in the decision-making process; the setting of goals, objectives and strategies. This in itself presents a requirement for coordination and cooperation, which should be fully resourced.