

Submission to Inquiry into Catchment Management

Submitted by

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1. The development of catchment management in Australia.

The development of catchment management has obviously been driven by the severe consequences of past actions of the Australian community in its quest to raise the living standards for themselves. The key to the future is not to have severe degradation as the trigger to doing something about our practices.

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

The catchment as a grouping of water resources is the logical step, however the grouping of people on the same basis is another matter altogether. Shire, state, geographical, economical historical and cultural boundaries have been the way we group ourselves in the past and well into the future, one would imagine.

As catchment management is concerning water resources mostly, it is a logical step forward, but must take into account all the above in the distribution and application of resources. The future will not be served by applying another set of obstacles to be overcome in developing co-operation with-in our community. Perhaps a new set of boundaries will help to overcome older ones by giving communities and opportunity to celebrate their similarities, rather than real and perceived differences.

3. Best practice methods for preventing, halting, and reversing environmental degradation in catchments and achieving environmental sustainability.

Best practice has the potential to become another name for not as bad as everyone else, as is already the case in many industries they have been using the term for more years than the rural industry. Best practice does not flourish in situations where survival is the main game, and the financial year is the timespan of most importance. It requires rigorous self-monitoring and evaluation as well as a process of "continuous improvement", a term not mentioned much at this stage.

Questions that may be asked are:

- Who draws up best practice?
- How are they evaluated as best practice?
- Best for whom?

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

The alarming trend of federal and state governments making laws and then handing the responsibility onto the next tier down causes concern that catchment management (sometimes called the fourth level of government) will become the enforcer of all that is politically unpopular.

Friction (or outright animosity) exists between many catchment groups and local governments. This is hardly surprising as shires have been lumbered with problems (weeds, pollution, health issues) of which may not be of burning issues their constituents look to local government to control (such as roads sewage etc). Catchment groups then have link in with local governments to address catchment issues such as weeds, very much as the poorer and often unwelcome party.

On a higher level of government, there is a great inability to move information down to catchment groups. This is due to the traditional view of ownership of information by government departments, a problem that seems to be being attacked at the moment, but also the technical problems of incompatible nature of the information such as different terms and file formats etc.

5. Planning, resourcing, implementation, co-ordination and co-operation in catchment management

Planning, co-ordination and co-operation are not big points with many land users in Australia, where independence, innovation and gut feeling have been the things usually seen as being required to tame a big and empty land.

Resourcing must be placed in the context of who is going to benefit from the actions that are taken by a land user. He cannot be expected to change his management practices at his own expense for the benefit of those downstream of his operation, especially when those downstream are the gross consumers of the landusers output, whether they be food, clothing, fuel, energy or taxes.

Implementation must be done with sole outcome of a better and more sustainable use of resources over the whole community. As well as onground improvements that are implemented, consideration must be given to the "holistic" benefits, such as education, development of skills such as co-operation and co-ordination, sense of self-worth and community and perhaps most of all the instilling into the coming generations of good sustainable habits.

6. Mechanisms for the monitoring, evaluation and reporting on catchment management programmes, including the use of these reports for the state of the environment reporting and the opportunities for review and improvement.

For monitoring and evaluation to be successful, the fear must be removed from the process. This is the fear of being wrong, made to look foolish, held responsible or the unsuitable for the job at hand. The facts must be laid out for all to see with no fear of any criticism from any quarter. This is a situation that so seldom occurs that true monitoring and evaluation is non-existent.

Yours Sincerely

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