

The Secretary of Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage
Inquiry into Catchment Management

With regard to the Terms of Reference sourced from the website (www.aph.gov.au) the Sarina Integrated Catchment Management Association would like to make the following comments as compiled by John Gunn, Sarina ICM/Landcare Coordinator.

- A little slower getting underway in Queensland than in southern states. The recent inflow of funding from the Natural Heritage Trust has provided the opportunity to develop and start implementing Catchment Strategies on a much wider basis than previously with some good work being done in the local area to integrate Catchment and Regional Strategies.
- The value of the approach to the management of the environment is difficult to measure quantitatively although it is a logical concept to manage natural resources based on divisions that are determined by natural resources. Property boundaries, local government boundaries and state government department regions and don't usually align with catchment boundaries which can cause some issues depending on the management of the agencies. Given more time for the various agencies to adopt the concept of basing natural resource management on natural boundaries the catchment management approach to management of the environment should prove to be most effective.
- Best practice methods of halting environmental degradation in catchments arise from developing an inclusive catchment management strategy as a starting point. If the cooperation of all stakeholders within a catchment is obtained and they are committed to achieving environmental sustainability then the best practice methods will follow. The most crucial step is probably the early development of a vegetation management plan for a catchment based on land use suitability studies and biodiversity considerations. If the information is not available to complete such a plan then the gathering of data is the first step. Best practice methods are often not easy to identify because the baseline data and interpretation is not sufficient.
- Each sector has an important role to play in catchment management so the real issue is more the coordination of activities rather than who is responsible for a particular action. Good coordination will result in all the sectors talking to each other and having a greater commitment to implementation of a catchment management strategy through active participation in action planning and on-ground works. It takes some time to build the networks and get the sectors talking to each other and working towards a common goal. This requires a degree of continuity also so it would be useful to establish a more permanent process for the implementation of catchment management than current arrangements that rely heavily on 'program' funding. Some secure core funding is necessary to retain the project officers who drive the catchment management approach and who develop an intimate understanding of the physical characteristics of the catchment as well as the 'political' environment and the necessary processes for advancing environmental management on a catchment basis.
- If catchments are to be continued to be used as the boundaries for natural resource management then it should be made a clear to all concerned and resources made available at all levels of government to ensure that the approach is carried forward. At present there are concerns that the planning stage of catchment management will be achieved but the implementation will stall due to lack of

resources. The minimum requirements to continue the process are human resources. Planning, implementation, coordination and cooperation all rely on a key player in the catchment driving the process and ensuring all the links are in place and functioning properly. Finding resources to implement catchment management will be less of an issue if the human resources required to coordinate the processes are available.

- Monitoring, evaluation and reporting on catchment management programs at present are often dependent on the source of funding and the requirements under funding arrangements. Reports could become a valuable tool in state of the environment reporting if a system of data collection was established and some standard approaches for monitoring and evaluation were suggested, and available, to catchment management groups. The amount of data generated would be difficult to collate if standards were not readily available to refer to. It certainly makes economic sense to expand or alter the monitoring and evaluation programs of projects if the added work will negate the need to the gather the same or similar data in a separate exercise. Some provision may need to be made to assist a project financially to compensate for any extra work required to alter monitoring and evaluation programs and to provide the information to the relevant agencies.

Catchment management is potentially the most valuable environmental management approach that has emerged in the recent past. It provides local people with the opportunity to manage natural resources and have ownership of the process. To be a continuing success there needs to be a consolidation of the approach through the certainty of resources to advance the approach and entrench it in the cultures of government agencies at all levels. For catchment management to be a success it needs to be around long enough so that the successes can be seen and best practices adopted by the community. It is a good approach to environmental management and is worthy of support from all sectors of the community. The Federal Government can play a lead role by supporting catchment management through resources and policy direction. The community is willing to do the work if the government is willing to support it.

Contact details

John Gunn

Sarina ICM Association Inc.

PO Box 682

Sarina 4737

Phone 07 49561388

Fax 07 49562384

Email sicma@mackay.net.au