



23 July 1999

North East Catchment
Management Authority
1 Mckoy St
Wodonga Vic 3690

Ph 02 60556133

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Environment & Heritage
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: INQUIRY INTO CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

The North East Catchment Management Authority would like to make a submission to the above inquiry and provides the following information. Attached is an outline of this CMA's roles and responsibilities, management and structure, and Regional Catchment Strategy actions.

Development of Catchment Management

Catchment Management Authorities in Victoria were formed on the 1st of July 1997 to integrate catchment management activities, and direct natural resource management by a Statutory Authority with community ownership. This is displayed by the makeup of the Board and its Implementation Committees, and enhances the model of community ownership and direction setting by the community.

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

Integrated catchment management involves the coordination of all programs (waterway management, floodplain management, salinity, water quality, biodiversity and pest plant and animal programs) to bring about effective improvement of the overall health of our catchments.

The structure and responsibilities of CMAs is an effective mechanism to bring about this change.

Role of Government, Private Sector and Community

All of the Australian community has a responsibility to protect the environment and improve the health of our catchments.

The North East Catchment Management Authority is the delivery mechanism to achieve this end. It is funded by;

- the regional community via a waterway management tariff levied against individual properties.
- State Government waterway management grant.
- Federal Natural Heritage Trust programs.

In this way cost of natural resource management is shared by local communities, State Government and the Federal Government. Strategies identify cost sharing arrangements based on the degree of public benefit derived.

Resourcing

As described above, programs are resourced from regional (tariff), State and Federal funding.

The Natural Heritage Trust program is a much needed source of funds for effective on ground works. However, the process in obtaining funds is very bureaucratic and complex. There are grant processes (State and Regional) that are far simpler and eagerly sought by landcare and other community groups.

Guidelines from Environment Australia and Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry Australia sometimes change (as is the case for funding riparian works in the North East under the National Landcare Plan).

An effective method for Commonwealth resourcing would be to have one Department administering NHT or equivalent natural resource management fund, and having a simpler process for administering grants (along the lines of the Victorian Government Community Weeds, Land Protection Incentive Scheme or Tree Victoria programs). Catchment Management Authorities through their Implementation Committees and the Regional Assessment panel identify catchment improvement projects and link priorities to the Regional Catchment Strategy outcomes. There would be efficiencies by delegating responsibilities to regional bodies to administer and audit grants. A logical sequence would be for Federal bodies to set priorities between states, state bodies such as the State Assessment Panel set priorities between regions and for regional bodies such as CMAs administer grants for natural resource management on ground works.

Mechanisms for Monitoring, Evaluating and Reporting

A suite of catchment indicators are being developed at a State and regional level to determine the most cost-effective way of measuring the effectiveness of catchment programs against the strategies and planning schemes in place. One such measure, the Index of Stream Condition, is being used to benchmark river health. It measures various parameters including hydrology, physical form, riparian zone, water quality and aquatic life to determine river health trends.

The NECMA appreciates the opportunity to make this submission regarding catchment management to the Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage and requests a hearing before the panel.

Yours sincerely,

John Riddiford
Chief Executive Officer

Attachment