

28/7/99

Mr Ian Dundas  
Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment & Heritage  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir,

Re Inquiry in to Catchment Management

Please find enclosed a submission by the Murray Darling Association on the above mentioned Inquiry.

This submission has been authorised by resolution of the Board of Management of the Murray Darling Association.

Yours sincerely,

Leon Broster  
GENERAL MANAGER

## **INQUIRY INTO CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT**

The Murray Darling Association is an association of local government municipalities, community groups, businesses and individuals with an interest in ensuring that the Murray-Darling Basin continues as a viable and valuable asset for all.

The Association is a key, non-government organisation within the Basin.

The Association has membership of over 80 councils along the Murray Darling and other major rivers as well as councils in metropolitan Adelaide and the Northern Spencer Gulf that rely on water from the Basin.

The Murray Darling Association wishes to make the following submission in relation to the Inquiry into Catchment Management.

### **GENERAL**

The Association strongly supports a catchment approach to the management of the environment as the best method of preventing, halting and reversing degradation of the Australian Landscape.

Successful catchment management in our rivers must be integrated to include in all levels of activity representatives of all major stakeholders and should not be the province of central governments alone.

Integrated Catchment Management also needs to include as participants all the agencies and/or groups that are involved in planning, be they town or land use planning by Local Government, natural resource planning, catchment groups or even economic development and social planning.

These sections need to work together to ensure catchment management is recognised by all spheres of government and all sectors of the community as a process they are able to freely participate in and to feel some level of ownership of.

### **SPECIFIC ISSUES**

#### **1. The role of the Murray-Darling Basin Initiative**

The Murray Darling Association is strongly committed to the current Murray-Darling Basin Initiative which we believe is the best example in the world of Integrated Catchment Management a large area.

From time to time there are suggestions made that the Murray-Darling Initiative which involves the Commonwealth, four States and the ACT needs to retreat from Basin-wide to allow a stronger state level of management.

The Murray Darling Association strenuously rejects any proposal to reduce the role and capacity of the Murray-Darling Basin Initiative and would support any reasonable strengthening of the Initiative.

## **2. Cross Border Issues**

The Murray Darling Association is concerned that particularly on the state border of the River Murray between New South Wales and Victoria there are situations where the states constitutional rights have reduced the effectiveness of catchment management.

Areas where this has from time to time been a problem include management of the Barmah/Millewa Forest where progress in adopting new management practices have been frustrated by state parochialism.

Flood plain management is another area where states can be less than helpful in relation to cross border management of a single river's flood plain. The tools of Integrated Catchment Management should be able to apply to all parts of a catchment irrespective of political boundaries either state or local.

## **3. Local Government**

Local Government is one of the three spheres of elected government in Australia. While in some States catchment authorities have significant authority, it is the view of the Murray Darling Association that the role of Local Government as an elected sphere of government should be better recognised and utilised.

At all levels of catchment management from local (sub) catchments to the large Murray-Darling Basin Catchment the Murray Darling Association considers that Local Government should be included as a legitimate participant in the decision making structures such as Catchment Boards, Authorities or Councils.

Local Government has considerable statutory functions which relate to catchment management including land use and town planning, differential rating powers in some States, significant power under various soil and land protection legislation, as well as a legal responsibility to provide good government at local level.

This experience and authority is often missing from the present system of catchment management and needs to be included.

## **4. Community Burnout**

Communities are concerned that with the devolution of management from central government to local and regional catchment groups there is a real risk of "the few" becoming "burn out".

While the Murray Darling Association supports the need for community and catchment ownership the issue of "burn out" needs to be recognised. We do not have an answer to this problem but are observing it occurring.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Murray Darling Association appreciates the opportunity to make comment to the Inquiry and would be available to give evidence to the Committee if called.

**Leon Broster**  
**GENERAL MANAGER**