

Submission by Bostobrick Landcare Group

to

INQUIRY INTO CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT
Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage

The Bostobrick Landcare Group Inc. wishes to make the following comments on Catchment Management:

- The Bostobrick Landcare area lies within the Clarence catchment. This catchment covers coastal plains, lowlands and high country. It is one of the largest catchments in NSW with very diverse land and vegetation types and equally diverse landuse. Catchment areas of such diversity can not be managed successfully using the current approach.

The Bostobrick Landcare Group considers it would be far more effective to manage catchments on a regional basis by amalgamating sections of a number of catchments, or amalgamating whole adjacent catchments that have similar features, eg Northern NSW Coastal Region and Northern NSW East Escarpment Region.

- The current structure of Management Committees is too top heavy with bureaucracy, with little on ground expertise. The structure has been politicised and hence ultimate decisions are political. This approach is not positive for the environment, nor is it beneficial in gaining or maintaining credibility in the broader community. Genuine farmers who depend on the land for the majority of income have limited representation. Forestry is another category sadly lacking the opportunity to freely have input. Conservation groups and the like are usually over represented. The percentage of available resource being swallowed up in administration is far too high. Empires have been built up with little benefit carrying through to ground level.

Manipulation of any restructure process is of significant concern. Many key players have already started manoeuvring in an attempt to create new levels or secure current positions. If positive outcomes for the environment are the desired outcome of catchment management then the current trend must be reversed.

- Catchment management is all about land management. Basic to successful catchment management is the involvement of the land managers in the catchment. Basic to land managers involvement is ongoing contact between the representatives and the management groups and hopefully, the implementation of recommendations coming from catchment management committees.

The major land managers in Australia are private landowners, local government councils and state government departments. These are the people who should make up the major proportion of catchment management committees. We suggest that such committees have a maximum of twelve (12) members. The temptation to add large numbers of "interested parties" and "experts" must be vigorously resisted.

Specifically, the land managers in the upper Clarence catchment and adjacent similar areas are private landowners, State Forests of NSW, NSW NPWS and local government councils. The suggested regional committee would comprise 5 private landowners, 1 SFNSW, 1 NPWS, 3 local government and 1 NSW Dept. Land and Water.

- Catchment management must be incentive based. Land managers must be encouraged to carry out activities that will enhance the environment, improve water quality and optimise water use. All too often private landowners are expected to carry the "save the environment" burden alone, whether it be imposed by regulation or the desires of some distant organisation. Imposing penalties is not the way of achieving positive results.

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Additionally, the socio/economic impact must be given equal weight to that of the environment and should be included in all decisions made and directions taken.

- The Bostobrick Landcare Group recommends the grouping of a small number of landowners, the production of sub-catchment plans and the allocations of funds such as by the National Heritage Trust to achieve the aims of such plans, as an effective way of achieving catchment management goals.

Please find attached a recent notation made to the NSW Healthy River Commission.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

David Ryan
President
Bostobrick Landcare Group
5th August 1999

BOSTOBRIK LANDCARE GROUP
Secretary Mr Col Andrews

The Bostobrick Landcare Group has for some time been sampling Wedgetail Creek, a tributary of the Little Murray, and which drains the landcare area. The aim of the sampling is to obtain long-term data to assist with the monitoring of the impact of activities on water quality. A Jackson Turbidity Tube is being used.

Turbidity readings have generally been below 30 NTUs - mostly below 15 NTUs.

During the period 14-16 July 1999 over 200 mm of rain were recorded in the catchment. The NTU reading just after the event was over 400. At the time of the catchment was fully vegetated with established pasture or native vegetation associations, except for the gravelled surfaced public road that runs through the catchment, Emersons Road.

Local landowners, members of the Landcare Group, observed during the heavy rain the flow of water along the table drains and through the pipes under Emersons Road then over well grassed paddocks to Wedgetail Creek.

In this case it is not farmers creating the major cause of high turbidity in Wedgetail Creek. Road run off has been identified as the problem. The turbidity in the Creek came from the road.

It is mostly agriculture, forestry or indeed local councils that are judged by groups in the community as being responsible for water degradation, yet these same groups fail to recognise just how the community benefits from such activities, even though there maybe adverse effects.

It has to be acknowledged that the community drives the need for these activities. Therefore, provided those carrying out such activities have taken all due care, if the community wants a problem solved to benefit the community, the community must pay more for agricultural products, more for housing, higher council rates - or specifically in the Wedgetail Creek catchment, for the Emersons Road drainage to be located away from drainage features and for the road to be sealed. It must not be expected that the local agricultural producers or the local council alone carry the financial burden in funding and correcting these ongoing concerns.