



COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT - HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES INQUIRY INTO CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

SUBMISSION

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of a framework for integrated catchment management in Victoria formally commenced in 1995 with the Victorian Government's establishment of Catchment and Land Protection (CALP) Boards in each of the ten Catchment and Land Protection Regions. The central task Mallee CALP Boards was to coordinate the establishment of this framework and to undertake the development of a Mallee Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS) to integrate existing successful natural resource management programs with emerging issues. Pivotal to the process of developing the Mallee RCS was community participation in devising an integrated vision for the Mallee catchment. In so doing, the Mallee community agreed on objectives for land and water management in the Mallee region, including determination of priorities for action and investment.

In 1996, a Statewide review of catchment management arrangements in Victoria was carried out with the aim of developing institutional arrangements that would most effectively and efficiently implement the RCSs. The current arrangement for catchment management in Victoria, the establishment of Catchment Management Authorities, was the major outcome of this review.

2. THE MALLEE CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY - SUMMARY

Vision

The Vision of the Mallee Catchment Management Authority is for:

a healthy and productive region in which natural resources are managed to meet the community's needs and expectations for now and the future.

Goals of the Mallee CMA

1. To ensure land resources are managed sustainably, productively and efficiently by preventing soil degradation and by controlling pest plants and animals
2. To ensure the quantity and quality of water resources are managed sustainably, productively and efficiently
3. To conserve biological diversity by protecting ecological communities and preventing further extinctions
4. To coordinate implementation of the Mallee Regional Catchment Strategy and facilitate sustainable regional development.

The Mallee Region

- ◆ The Mallee catchment occupies 43,000 square kilometres in the north west of Victoria
- ◆ Population is approximately 62,500 with 37% living in the city of Mildura
- Other major centres are Red Cliffs, Robinvale, Merbein, Ouyen, Irymple and Birchip
- Although outside the region, Swan Hill is a major resource centre for the Mallee region
- ◆ Rainfall is low, between 250 and 350 mm
- ◆ While not part of the Mallee CMA region, the Murray River is a major influence
- ◆ Extensive wind blown sand and clays that have formed on calcareous landforms exist in the region
- ◆ Agriculture remains the most economically important industry in the Mallee, contributing up to 15% of the state's gross agricultural production
- ◆ Major agricultural industries are:
 - Cereals
 - Prime lambs
 - citrus
 - diversified irrigated horticulture
 - wine grapes
 - dried fruit
- ◆ Parks and reserves represent a large proportion of the Mallee region. The Mallee parks together with the Big Desert Wilderness comprise almost 40% of the total area of parks in Victoria
- ◆ Mallee Parks contain extensive areas of largely undisturbed vegetation
- ◆ Mallee Parks and the Murray River provide extensive opportunities for leisure activities
- ◆ Tourism is making an ever-increasing contribution to the regional economy.

Why an Integrated Approach

Agricultural production from the region is a major contributor to the Victorian economy with up to 15% of the state's gross agricultural production coming from the Mallee. All agricultural industries have the potential to increase production over the next decade. This is particularly true for rapidly developing irrigated horticulture.

It is crucial that these productive activities are carried out in a sustainable manner without detrimental impact on the environmental values, which are of major significance at both state and national levels.

In the Mallee most forms of land degradation are present and include:

- Pest plants (weeds) and pest animals
- Dryland and water salinity
- Wind and water erosion
- Soil acidity and soil structure decline
- Stream pollution, turbidity and eutrophication
- Rising water tables

- Loss of biodiversity

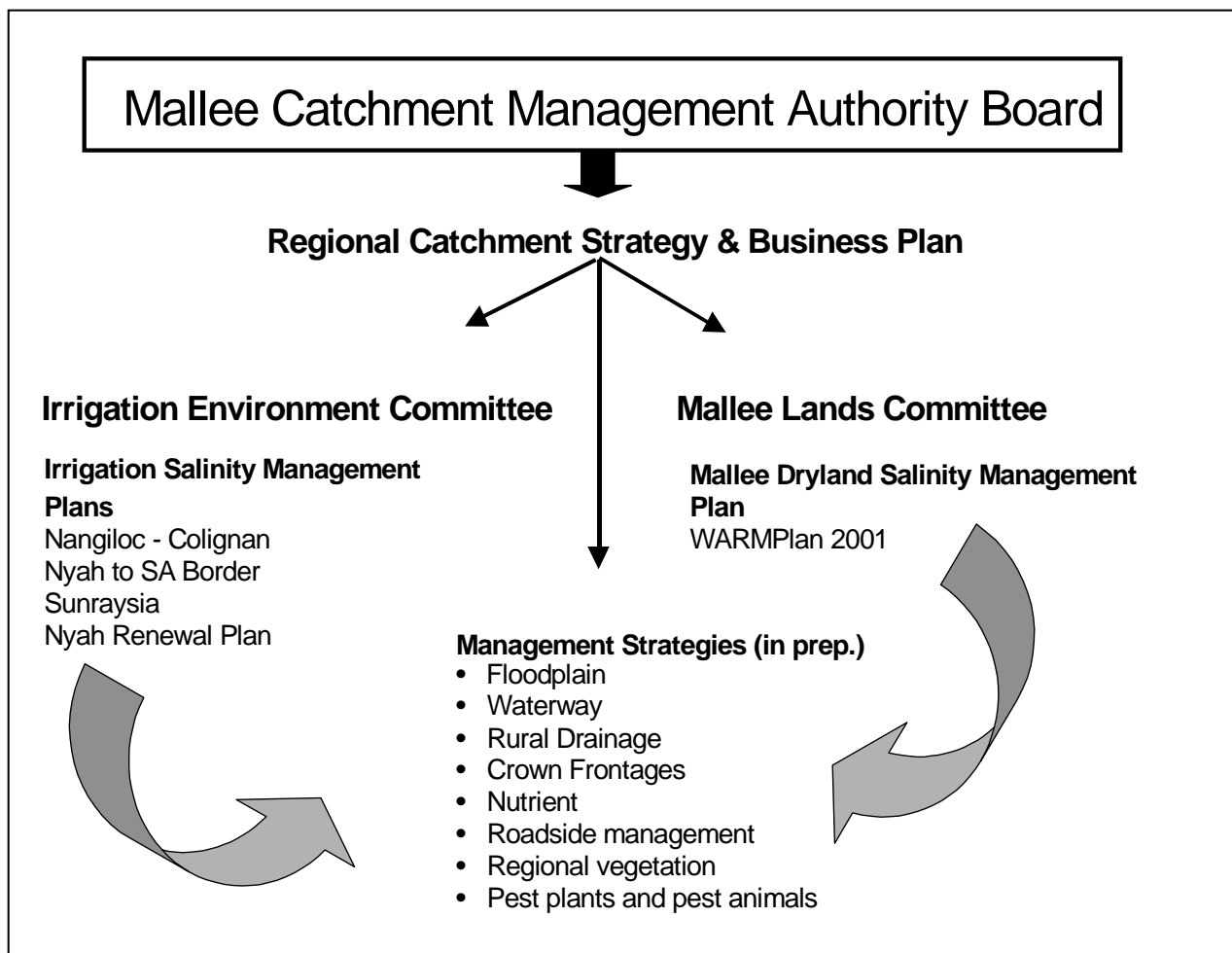
Regional Catchment Strategy

The Mallee Catchment Management Authority undertakes its activities through the implementation of its RCS. The Strategy sets out the priorities for activity and explains the responsibilities of the CMA.

Implementation of the RCS is undertaken through a number of issue specific strategies, the development of which is overseen by community based steering committees with technical support provided by government agencies. Two Mallee CMA Implementation Committees oversee the implementation of these strategies. The organisation structure is depicted below.

Organisation Structure

A ministerially appointed Board of Directors governs the Mallee Catchment Management Authority. The Board is responsible for the strategic direction of the Authority and for the provision of advice to Government on natural resource management issues. Two Implementation Committees (ICs), one for irrigation issues and one for dryland issues, oversee the implementation of range of strategies and plans. A small team of executive and administrative staff supports the operations of the Board and ICs.



Strengths of the CMA Approach to Natural Resource Management

A Clear Focus

The Mallee CMA is the peak body responsible for coordination of implementation of the Mallee RCS. This has clarified the roles and responsibilities of both government and community natural resource management groups within the Mallee CMA region.

Integrated planning and management

The Mallee CMA integrates the activities of government agencies (extension service providers, public land managers and statutory planners), water authorities (rural and urban), local government, community groups and the wider community in its planning activities (strategies) and implementation efforts. The development of an annual Regional Management Plan (RMP) details the specific responsibilities of these various organisations, individuals and groups toward ensuring integrated natural resource management.

Empowering the Community

The Mallee CMA Board and ICs comprise community people recognised by local communities for their skills and leadership in various natural resource management areas. Networking and communication with community groups such as Landcare, farming groups and so on, allows the CMA to further embrace the various 'sections' of community to ensure that the activities remain focussed on the regional priorities.

SPECIFIC RESPONSE TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

- **THE DEVELOPMENT OF CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT IN AUSTRALIA;**

The catchment management structure in place in Victoria has provided a clear definition of the highest natural resource management priorities to be addressed.

It has allowed better partnerships to form (ie between Water Authorities and government agencies) and provided a coordinating role that had been weak in the past.

The biggest advantage of the catchment management approach is greater community ownership of the natural resource management process and the capacity to integrate a number of different plans, strategies and programs in a highly effective and efficient manner.

- **THE VALUE OF A CATCHMENT APPROACH TO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT;**

The approach enables coordinated planning and priority setting on an issue or geographical base. It integrates operations across programs and results in greater community empowerment.

Care should be taken however, to not under estimate the level of resources required for the task and to not lose sight of the strategic approach required. In some areas such as the Mallee, the 'catchment' concept is difficult to embrace given the physical terrain of the region. It is important to have a broad definition of 'catchment', comprising several 'sub catchments'. "Catchment" should be interpreted in a broad sense, not only referring to surface water but also other environmental issues such as salinity, wind erosion, pest plants and animals and biodiversity.

The catchment approach is however, the most ideal framework through which to determine investment in a region. Funding programs such as the Natural Heritage Trust would be best served by allocating funding to regional bodies such as CMAs to consider the most suitable investment priorities in any given season.

- **BEST PRACTICE METHODS OF PREVENTING, HALTING AND REVERSING ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN CATCHMENTS AND ACHIEVING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY;**

'Best practice' is often difficult to define. The parameters for what best practice actually means must have regional clarification. The catchment approach has distinct advantages over other approaches in this regard as local, regional and interstate impacts are clearly on the agenda when defining what best practice actually means. In terms of environmental management, the introduction, development and promotion of quality assurance systems such as EMS is best suited to a catchment level.

Importantly, good planning, coordinated at regional (catchment level) is of paramount importance to the development of best practice. The catchment approach, specifically through it's integrated capacity, is best suited to ensuring the appropriate planning mechanisms are in place, the outcomes of which will be best practice.

Furthermore, environmental problems usually have more than one cause and more than one remedy. Only through a catchment approach can it be ensured that the most effective and efficient methodologies are being utilised in defining 'best practice'.

- **THE ROLE OF DIFFERENT LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT, THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND THE COMMUNITY IN THE MANAGEMENT OF CATCHMENT AREAS;**

In the Mallee CMA region considerable effort is being placed on:

- ensuring the community 'owns' the process;
- increasing private sector ownership of (and investment in) community based issues; and
- advising state government on the highest priorities for investment.

It can be difficult however, when the Commonwealth Government provides resources to organisations outside of the CMA / State partnership process. This might include a specific contract with Environment Australia, for example. If the Commonwealth utilised the CMA / State partnership for provision of resources, the CMA can ensure that duplication is avoided and that the highest regional priorities are being addressed.

Accordingly, all levels of government should use the CMA structure as the over arching mechanism for environmental management and the primary means of channelling funds into environmental management.

- **PLANNING, RESOURCING, IMPLEMENTATION, COORDINATION AND COOPERATION IN CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT; AND,**

The resources required for planning and implementation can be easily under estimated. The CMA structure does, however, carry out it's functions in a far more resource efficient manner than the previously (largely uncoordinated) state agency service arrangement.

Appropriate cost sharing arrangements across all levels of community need to be sought to ensure the availability of resources for long term natural resource management

- **MECHANISMS FOR MONITORING, EVALUATING AND REPORTING ON CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS, INCLUDING THE USE OF THESE REPORTS FOR STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT REPORTING AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR REVIEW AND IMPROVEMENT.**

Catchment condition indicators are imperative to effective monitoring of investment activities. Where such indicators do not exist, government should immediately provide resources toward ensuring they are determined.

The Annual reporting process is a useful means for comparing catchment condition change, however, the Mallee CMA relies on monitoring information much more frequently to enable investment variations to occur within any specific budget year.