



**MARANOA-BALONNE CATCHMENT  
MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION INC**

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Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
[Environment.Reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:Environment.Reps@aph.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam

Following is the Maranoa-Balonne Catchment Management Association's submission to the Inquiry into public good conservation – Impact of environmental measures imposed on landholders. We appreciate this opportunity and the extra time given to submit our comments.

Sincerely

Tammie Saunders  
Catchment Coordinator

On behalf of the Management Committee

John Ford  
Chair

Sue Ferguson  
Secretary

Ruth Spencer  
Vice Chair

David Dorrrough  
Treasurer

And Working Committee Members

Gary Harch  
Malcolm Topp  
Lloyd Harth

## **SOME COMMENTS ON PUBLIC GOOD CONSERVATION MEASURES IMPOSED ON LANDHOLDERS**

### *INTRODUCTION*

The Maranoa-Balonne Catchment Management Association is one of four committees established within the Queensland portion of the Murray-Darling Basin. The role of the committee is to provide a forum for community input and discussion on resource issues within the catchment. The committee has also identified and prioritised catchment management strategies.

The committee includes representatives from the Community, Indigenous groups, Agriculture, State Government Departments, Industry, Landcare, Local Government and Water and Irrigation groups. We have a common vision:

The whole community supporting and taking responsibility for integrating the management of land, water and related resources, and achieving the sustainable and balanced use of these resources.

The committee recognises viability of productive lands is the most important factor in achieving sustainable natural resource management within this catchment.

Government, producers and the wider community agree that it is desirable to achieve sustainable landuse that makes a significant contribution to conservation of natural resources. If this is to be achieved, the costs of such undertakings should be shared in the same way that the benefits are.

The Maranoa-Balonne Catchment Management Association values this opportunity to draw attention to the on-going conservation work undertaken by landholders and the need for continued support of their efforts which benefit us all.

### *IMPACTS*

Over the past decade, rural landholders and farmers have faced drought, declining terms of trade and increasing controls imposed by government. It appears the bulk of responsibility for implementing conservation measures is also being placed on rural landholders and farmers.

Landholders and farmers are struggling to deal with questions of viability versus conservation. Can there be a balance? Every farmer is overshadowed by the threat of clearing and water harvesting. Does the whole of Australia value it enough to compensate struggling landholders to be custodians of this vast arid land? Farmers are left wondering if Governments are aware that time is quickly running out and Australia is losing to desertification. Will it be another Sahara Desert in time to come? Just as minerals are extracted through mining, the nutrients are being extracted from farming and grazing land via production. Chemicals and other means provide short-term gains but they may accumulate and threaten long-term viability. Other solutions need to be tried and tested.

This is not to say that rural landholders and farmers will not take up or have not taken up the challenge of responsibility through action. In fact, most already have by undertaking conservation works on-farm. Public-good conservation is often a by-product of undertaking best management practices. This must be qualified though by saying that it can only happen when economic circumstances allow. If rural landholders and farmers are being asked to take on this responsibility it seems only fair that costs of public-good conservation be shared in the same way that the benefits are.

There is a need for continued support of landholders undertaking public-good conservation measures. Activities such as fencing off riparian or remnant vegetation are generally supported by organisations such as Catchment Committees, Landcare groups and Greening Australia through Natural Heritage Trust funds. This funding source however generally focuses on the immediate implementation and not on-going support. Will new funding sources be made available when these funds run out?

Increasing controls and responsibility have created resentment for Government amongst some landholders. The resentment also extends to the media for pushing a negative image of Queensland's primary producers. These images along with government showing little faith in the ability of landholders to manage their own land have caused much stress. These feelings were well voiced at a rally held in Roma against the State Government's proposed tree clearing legislation.

Rural landholders and farmers are angry because there has been little recognition or faith shown in the great advances made by the majority of them to undertake natural resource management. Rural Landholders and farmers have faced and made many changes in their approaches to management. However, change is a slow process. **Change requires not only the will to change but the means to do so.**

Those who have made that leap of faith into new management practices and techniques are in some cases starting to see rewards both economically and environmentally. Are these people going to be asked to take responsibility for conservation as they had the foresight to do it? What about their neighbours who continue to develop their land for short term gain and unsustainable management.

A glaring example of this is water sharing problems that face the irrigation industry and effects on river viability. Who should have the water and the wealth it generates? These are threats that must be faced looking at the benefits to the whole of Australia.

The impacts of legislation placing responsibility for public-good conservation onto rural landholders and farmers can be reduced through support and acknowledgement of the work they are doing.

#### *POLICY MEASURES ADOPTED INTERNATIONALLY*

International environmental issues such as greenhouse gas emissions have raised questions about sharing costs of conservation measures to address them. The Maranoa-Balonne Catchment Management Association wishes the Standing Committee to examine the following questions:

Where are greenhouse gases being produced in Australia?

Is the rural community being asked to provide on-ground solutions such as retention and planting of trees for a 'carbon sink'? If so, what incentives or compensation are planned to ensure this happens?

Policy measures may be based on international data and standards but adopted and implemented at a local level if costs are to be shared equitably.

#### *CONSERVATION MEASURES -ESTABLISHING PRIVATE AND PUBLIC-GOOD COMPONENTS*

The Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) helps landholders fund conservation on-farm which has a private and public good component. NHT funding set out 50:50 contributions between landholders and the government. This sends out the message that 50% public-good will come from the actions funded. A Regional Assessment Panel (RAP) determines which

projects are funded with this ratio. However, this ratio seems to be determined at the whim of bureaucracy. Over the past two years in the South Queensland region, the RAP has had to negotiate with the Environmental Protection Agency and AFFA to find acceptable ratios for different types of work. This does not present as a logical or acceptable process by which public and private components of conservation measures are determined. Surely, a better approach would be previously agreed values negotiated with stakeholders which are set out in the application form rather than negotiations with members of an assessment panel. The process of how ratios are determined must be made transparent so landholders trying to attract funds know what private funds they need to commit to the project.

#### *RECOMMENDATIONS – EQUITABLE SHARING OF COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH PUBLIC-GOOD CONSERVATION*

Support in some form is necessary to reward landholders and farmer efforts to conserve. The Maranoa-Balonne Catchment Management Association suggests rate rebates as a means to equitably share costs of public-good conservation. The scheme is already in progress through Greening Australia with NHT funds, thus is recognised by Senator Hill. Local councils could administer the rate rebate with funds coming from State/Federal Government. The scheme would need to be monitored to ensure compliance from landholders and honesty of councils in passing on savings.

#### *CONCLUSION*

Greater recognition and support of landholders' and farmers' efforts to conserve and manage our natural resources will bring benefits to all Australians.