

CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

from

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The Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition (CVCC), a community group in the Clarence Valley, has been interested in water and catchment issues since its formation in the late 1980s.

Because of the shortage of time and other commitments, this submission will be brief and will consist of a number of summary points. If the Committee proposes to seek further input from the community at a later stage, this group would be interested in participating further.

CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

- The catchment is a fundamental landscape unit and is the only logical framework for ecologically sustainable planning.
- The approach must be to sustainably manage whole catchments. This is in effect ecosystem management.
- The need for such an approach is supported by the following statement by John Williams (CSIRO Division of Soils)
*Extensive land degradation in rural Australia is testimony to the fact that current farming systems are not sustainable. The current practices are both mining the reservoir of nutrients and carbon as well as perturbing the ecological and hydrological balances of our landscapes. Land degradation is often the result of failure to examine the whole farming system in the context of the hydrological or nutrient cycle in which it is cast. Progress towards sustainable agricultural practices will only be made while the implications of these practices are viewed and examined as part of the **regional ecosystem**. Agricultural scientists and the farming community must think beyond the farm gate to see **how the farm is integrated with the catchment and the landscape as a whole**.*
(Williams, 1994)
- Ecologically sustainable management of catchments as ecosystems will embrace the following:
 - a) A clear understanding will need to be developed of the difference between ecological sustainability and ecologically sustainable development (ESD) as a means to that end. ¹
 - b) A commitment will need to be developed by governments, business, and individuals to a set of sustainability principles (as identified in the Final Report for Phase One of the Northern Rivers Regional Strategy and in the Clarence Valley settlement Strategy)
 - c) The approach arising from the application of such principles will be one which is fully integrated management planning of whole catchments.
The thinking must be holistic and proactive, not reactive and demand driven as occurs when there is a lack of integration in the planning process.
 - d) The catchment plan should be developed as a result of identification of and knowledge of the catchment's components such as key vegetation communities and productive soils which should be kept forever.
 - e) The catchment plan will need to establish acceptable limits beyond which ecosystem resilience is diminished and resource use is unsustainable.
 - f) All relevant institutional arrangements should be based on the catchment. Total Catchment Management Committees should have a key role.
Many existing institutional arrangements have artificially divided responsibilities for ecosystem components and this has led to environmental degradation.
Integrated arrangements are needed at all levels of decision making.

¹ See Towards an ecological framework for sustainability: considerations for ecosystem management, Stephen Dovers and Tony Norton, Centre for Resource and Environment Studies, Australian national University.

- g) Agencies such as the National Parks and Wildlife Service, State Forests, Department of Agriculture should develop catchment plans which will integrate with the overall catchment plan.
- h) Local government thinking (in relation to instruments such as LEPs) should support the total catchment framework derived from the catchment plan.
- i) State governments will need to modify their planning controls to fit in with individual catchment plans.
- j) Total Catchment Management Committees will need to play a lead role in community consultation. They should seek to set the example to inspire each catchment's community to embrace the principles of ecological sustainability.
The composition of these committees should be representative of the whole community.
The catchment plan will need to coordinate the valuable restorative work of community groups such as Landcare.

Conclusion

Modern planning can no longer be confined to the non-holistic thinking of DAs and EISs. It must be catchment-based to avoid the creeping environmental degradation that results from cumulative impacts.

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