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RPM:WAN

10 August 1999

The Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Environment and Heritage
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir

SUBJECT: INQUIRY INTO CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

Goulburn City Council is a water supply authority situated at the upper end of the Wollondilly River catchment. The Wollondilly River flows into Lake Burragorang which is the major water storage for the Sydney Water Corporation. In recent years the Council has become acutely aware of the impact of poor catchment health on the level of treatment required to produce a potable water supply. Significant financial and staff resources are now directed to catchment management and therefore Council staff have prepared a short submission based on the experience of managing the Goulburn City Council water supply catchment.

Executive Summary

The century old focus of primary production is set around livestock and food crops. In recent years timber has begun to be seen as a primary product but the most valuable primary product is now clean water.

Whilst federal governments of many past generations actively subsidised land clearing it is now time to designate those catchments which supply raw water and legislate to reverse the environmental degradation.

Catchment Management cannot be adequately funded or properly controlled by local government authorities with a small population base. It is highly desirable that the costs of restoring degraded catchments are funded by the larger population centres that utilise the treated water.

Most regional local government authorities rely on development to increase their rating base and population. Catchment management does not increase their income stream and cannot be financed by what is often only several thousand residents.

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Conclusion

It is essential that catchment management practices be financed and managed by the downstream users – not the land occupiers. Catchment based authorities are best placed to equitably spread the cost of halting and reversing environmental degradation.

BACKGROUND

Goulburn City Council has two major raw water storages, Pejar Dam and Sooley Dam, both of which are situated outside the Goulburn City Council local government area. Goulburn City Council is therefore involved in catchment management of two catchment districts within a different local government area. As well there are a number of regional committees involved in catchment management of not only the Pejar and Sooley catchments but the whole of the Lake Burragorang/Warragamba Dam catchment.

There have been a number of extensive enquiries into catchment management in recent years viz The Healthy Rivers Commission and the McClelland Enquiry. In each of these the effectiveness of many Government agencies and Local Government is questioned.

It is the opinion of Goulburn City Council that there are 3 significant underlying reasons for poor catchment health in the Sydney Water Corporation catchment.

These are:

- (a) Local Government authorities do not have water quality as a higher priority than land development. This has led to a long term negative impact on water quality
- (b) Local Government authorities are often not reliant on drinking water from catchments within their own LGA
- (c) Local Government authorities cannot fund the required landuse planning systems as they require significant capital expenditure and staff resources

Therefore Goulburn City Council supports a catchment management approach that has boundaries set on watersheds and not local government boundaries. The funding of catchment management should be spread across all the beneficiaries of the designated catchment.

Council has investigated catchment management practices and determined that there are two critical requirements for water quality and quantity.

- (i) A high percentage of vegetation cover
- (ii) Natural buffer zones adjacent to water courses and water storages.

The matters listed for attention in the inquiry place a significant workload on a multipurpose local government authority. In view of the significant investment and income generated by water supply authorities it is desirable that State Governments form regional catchment based water supply authorities.

Please contact the undersigned on 4823 4464 for additional details on the issues mentioned.

Yours faithfully

R P MOWLE
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS
for
GENERAL MANAGER