

324 (b)  
CEO 472/99  
Bev Thurlow  
9278 0300

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

Dear Sir

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE INQUIRY INTO CATCHMENT  
MANAGEMENT**

The Water and Rivers Commission is Western Australia's primary water resource management agency. Its mission is to manage the water resources of Western Australia for the benefit of present and future generations in partnership with the community. Catchment management initiatives and their relationship to water resource values is therefore, an issue of considerable importance to the Commission.

The Commission thanks the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage for the opportunity to submit to the inquiry on catchment management and offers the following comments.

Catchment management, by its very nature, seeks to co-ordinate and integrate a variety of public and private interests. There is a need to recognise this in the Australian democratic tradition. This will not be achieved solely by a top down command and control approach from single government entities. Bearing in mind previous attempts, it requires a degree of re-invention of how to go about the task.

The Commission has been, and is involved with two unique endeavours in integrated catchment management (ICM) and integrated natural resource management (INRM). They are:

- The Salinity Management approach used by Western Australia. This is effectively a "holding company" approach to integration at policy level between the agencies. The Board of the "holding company" is made up of a Standing Committee of State Cabinet chaired by the Deputy Premier. The Committee comprises the Ministers for Agriculture/Primary Industry, Environment and Water Resources and the respective Chief Executive Officers (CEO) of the natural resource management agencies. Through the CEO's other agencies are involved as necessary. The core agencies are Agriculture Western Australia, Conservation and Land Management Department, Department of Environmental Protection and the Water and Rivers Commission. The Department of Land Administration and Ministry for Planning are co-opted as necessary.
- Currently the holding company is developing a policy framework instead of statutes, for INRM by using generic contracts between regional community groups to achieve outcomes. This is very adaptable and flexible.

- The Commission, the Ministry for Planning and the Department of Protection/Environmental Protection Authority have developed an integrated catchment management approach for groundwater mounds around Perth, which co-ordinates and integrates existing legislative instruments without new legislation. Protection and management is achieved in one document through the use of a State Planning Policy (*Town Planning and Development Act*), Environmental Protection Policy (*Environmental Protection Act*) and Under Ground Water Control Areas and Regulations (*Metropolitan Water Supply Sewage and Drainage Act*).

Accordingly, the Commission's main areas of interest in this inquiry are:

- Understanding, endorsement and a long term commitment to the evolving Western Australian approach.
- Recognition of the need for a flexible approach that caters for various issues and the differences between urban and rural approaches.
- Evolving a catchment management framework as a tool for natural resource management.
- Appreciation of the need for diversity of approach throughout Australia (State commitment through State strategies and programs).
- Relevance of the research and development cycle.
- Appreciation of the impact of social transition in catchment management.
- Recognition of the practical limit to coordinating management by community and the balance with realistic business management by agencies.

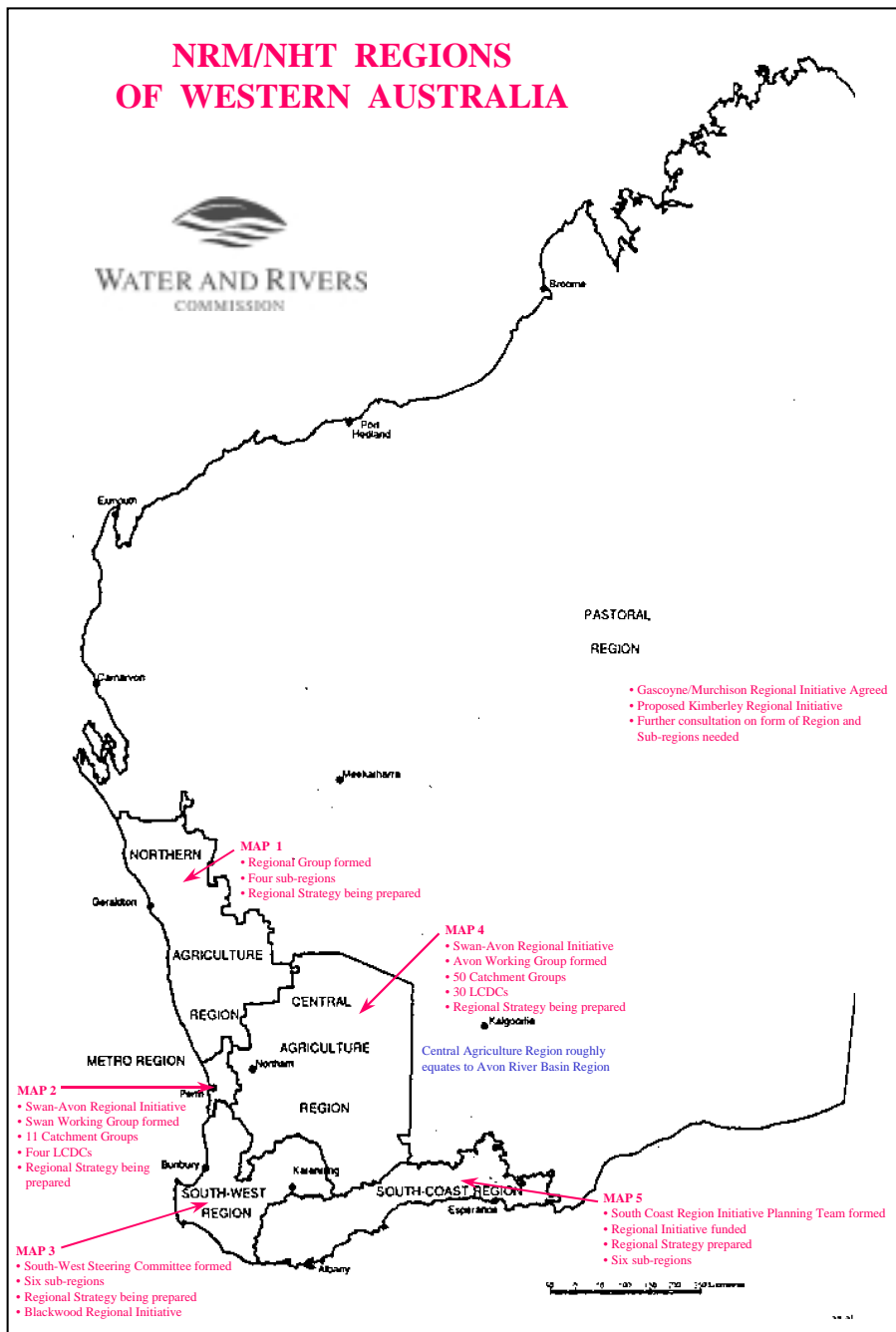
Please find attached the Commission's detailed submission. Should you require any further information or clarification, please feel free to contact Ms Bev Thurlow on (08)9278 0706.

Yours sincerely

Roger F Payne  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

6 August 1999

# NRM/NHT REGIONS OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



**Attachment 2.**

## **WATER & RIVERS COMMISSION SUBMISSION**

### **1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT IN (WESTERN) AUSTRALIA**

The community, local and State Governments have recognised there is a need for integrated catchment management<sup>1</sup> (ICM) in Western Australia. The aim of integrated catchment management is to bring all stakeholders (with different and competing interests) together to form a plan of action that addresses social, economic and ecological concerns within a catchment. Environmental sustainable development of the State's vital natural resources can be assisted by establishing community based management bodies to work in partnership with agencies and local government. The Water and Rivers Commission is committed to this approach, because what happens in a catchment affects water resources.

No single group or agency has overall responsibility for catchment management. Likewise, there is no single piece of legislation that provides a total framework for catchment management.

At the same time, four natural resource management government agencies (the Water and Rivers Commission, Department of Environmental Protection, Conservation and Land Management and Agriculture WA), local governments, numerous community groups, and individual landholders all have catchment management roles and responsibilities. Some of these responsibilities are statutory and some are voluntary based on partnerships.

In recent years, agencies and groups have taken steps to significantly improve coordinated management. This includes development of government policies on ICM, environmental scans for State of the Environment reporting, the formation of Integrated Catchment Management Coordinating Groups (ICMCG's), preparation of Regional Initiatives to, development of business programs (ie AgWA's Sustainable Rural Development program, the Commission's Waterways WA program) and preparation of ICM strategies and plans.

There is a strong desire in the community to have a management structure that results in an organised approach to catchment management. There is an equally strong desire that the community has a key role in the management of the catchment. The solution lies in the establishment of a community body coupled with agencies that will support the group. The community body can harness local knowledge, enthusiasm, liaison and resources and provide direction.

At the same time, the Commission recognises that it would not be possible to develop an overall planned catchment management strategy without a coordinated system of management. A coordinated body in partnership with the various agencies and groups could

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<sup>1</sup> Integrated catchment management is the coordinated planning, use and management of water, land, vegetation and other natural resources on a river or groundwater catchment basis.

drive a program towards restoring catchments, waterways, rivers and drains to a more healthy state while still optimising rural productivity and economic benefit.

Western Australia (WA) is in the process of developing such a system. Rather than have a single piece of legislation for catchment management, it is proposed that catchment management in WA be underpinned by a negotiated policy framework and supported by a package of legislation. It is believed that creating a single natural resources Act at this stage would be premature and could inhibit the development of cooperation and trust between stakeholders. There is a need for diversity of approach across Australia, and even within WA depending on the diversity of issues, population density, land-use and land holdings.

The development of this policy is based on a number of key points:

- Government coordination and commitment is vital, and is rated as essential by community groups.
- Evolution of a Ministerial Committee and peak State Natural Resource Management (NRM) coordinating body.
- Formation of regional and sub-regional NRM groups appropriate to the biophysical and social situations.
- Shared “lead agencies’ responsibilities to coordinate Government inputs and provide principal support to NRM groups.
- Formation of regional and sub regional Government officer’s forums to provide coordination and support.
- Preparation and recognition of Regional and Sub-regional strategies by community groups. The State NRM policy to provide detail on information that should be included in the strategy.
- Preparation of partnership agreements between Government and community detailing the roles, responsibilities and commitments of all parties. The State NRM policy provides detail on what is expected in a partnership agreement.
- That existing legislation is used separately and cooperatively wherever possible in accordance with the signed partnership agreements.

A draft of the State NRM policy has been written and is currently being reviewed by regional NRM groups.

Apart from this, there has also been development of NRM groups at a regional, sub-regional and local level. Based on the regional boundaries (refer appendix 1) established to administer the National Heritage Trust (NHT), groups have been formed at;

- South Coast region - South Coast Regional Initiative Partnership Team (SCRIPT)
- South West region - South West Catchment Council (SWCC)
- Swan Avon region - Swan Avon Integrated Catchment Management Catchment Group (SAICMCG) which includes;
  - Swan Catchment Council
  - Avon Working Group
- Northern Agricultural Integrated Management Strategy (NAIMS)
- North West/Pastoral

With the exception of the NorthWest region, all others regions have regional initiatives/strategies or are in the process of developing them.

The Commission has also been involved in supporting the development of groups at a sub regional or river basin level. The Commission has established a catchment group Geocatch, at Geographe Bay using what is known as the sponsorship model.

Basically, the sponsorship model enables a coordinating body to be formed under the umbrella of any of the natural resource management authorities with support and sponsorship from the appropriate agency, ie depending on the predominant resource and management issue.

The agencies also delegate power to the coordinating body to enable it to undertake particular activities on behalf of the NRM agency. The relationship and business dealing would be managed through mutual trust and a Memorandum of Understanding.

For example, where the Commission is the sponsoring organisation, the ICM body would be formed under the delegated power of the Commission's Board through Section 15 of Schedule 1 of the *Water and Rivers Commission Act 1995*.

The ICM body would be empowered by the Commission's Board and a Memorandum of Understanding with the Commission and other agencies. The Commission and the ICM body would work together to develop suitable policies for water resources management in the catchment area. The Commission could apply these policies in its work in the area.

In return, the ICM body would be expected to make decisions within the area of delegation operating in partnership with the Commission.

Once an ICM body is established, one of its first priorities would be to consider and establish relationships with important organisations. The negotiated relationships could be signed of in the above mentioned Memorandum of Understanding much like a partnership agreement to manage the natural resources in that catchment.

Geocatch was the first of its kind, however (sponsorship model) it is expected that other groups will be established under the *Water and Rivers Commission Act 1995* at Moore River and Cockburn.

In addition to this, the Commission is also developing a framework for the evolution of Waterways Management Authorities to be a part of the overall NRM framework. Using the Waterways Conservation Act 1976, the then Waterways Commission (now part of the Water and Rivers Commission) created five Waterways Management Authorities (WMA's) on key waterways (mainly estuaries) in the south west of the state. These WMA's were established to focus on waterways issues only and the Commission is of the opinion that it is important that water resource management is part of the over all NRM framework. It is expected that there will be the development of catchment groups in these areas because of WMA reform. It is possible that new catchment groups will be formed at Leschenault Inlet catchment and the Wilson Inlet catchment.

In an urban context the Commission supports the Swan Catchment Centre and coordinators to facilitate the development of NRM in the Swan Catchment and the Perth metropolitan area.

## **2. THE VALUE OF A CATCHMENT APPROACH TO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

The Water and Rivers Commission is committed to the establishment of a catchment approach to NRM, especially in the long term. For this system of management to achieve greater results there is a requirement for a certain amount of social transition/adoption to occur.

As society changes its way of thinking and operating with regard to NRM, so to will the value of catchment management increase. Even so, there is still value in the use of catchment management in the short to mid term. The value of managing resources in catchment approach includes:

- Greater efficiency and less duplication of Government agency inputs. It is considered there is significant overlap between methods used for both land and water management and catchment management provides a way of managing land and water resources without duplication.
- More effective allocation of limited resources through better coordination and 'sign off' with community groups. In many areas, individuals and businesses undertake NRM work and it is important there is some level of community ownership of the process that decides what should be done and where.
- Clearer allocation of roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for Government agencies and community groups. In the previous section, there was discussion of the uses of partnership agreements between Government and the community. Using these agreements will lead to more focused use of State Government and external funding, including 'sign off' on agency deliverables by chief executives from the NRM agencies.
- A combination of the last two points will lead to much better delivery of management 'on the ground' because of a clearer combined sense direction and better use of resources. Using a catchment approach will also lead to better coordinated priority setting and more congruence between all parties in setting and achieving objectives.
- In terms of the sustainability of NRM, it is considered that more effective trade-offs will be made in a more open environment of a strategic NRM group.
- There will be less confusion and more consistent support from the community for strategic direction and use of resources. This can lead to stronger and better coordination with State and Regional planning and resources development.
- With greater support for decision-making etc, all parties will be 'singing the same song'. This will lead to a better bargaining position for groups and agencies when they deal with the Commonwealth or other sources of external funding.

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

There are various methods that can be used in catchment management and new methods are being developed all the time. These include practices such as:

- Restoration of riparian vegetation, especially on first and second order streams.
- Greater levels of tree planting in catchment and protection of remnant vegetation in the catchment ie catchment clearing controls.
- Stocking rates and protection of riparian zones.
- Use of detention basins and water sensitive design.
- Community education.
- Greater use of strategic regional planning tools.

An important issue in evaluating the success of catchment restoration practices is scale of time and the requirement for social transition. Most of the tools used to halt degradation in catchments are long term and there may not be results for 30 or 40 years. For many of the methods to achieve success there needs to be social transition by our community. In other words, we need to change the way we do things. It will take some time before we alter our thought processes and subsequent mode of operation, then there is some chance that we can operate sustainably in the catchment.

Another point to consider is that the methods used and how successful they are largely depends on the geomorphology of the catchment. A method successfully used on an eastern seaboard catchment may not be successful on a sandy catchment in Western Australia.

Some methods can be adapted to local conditions and through research and development to be done at the local level. Even more important is that research and development needs to be linked to planning and implementation. This way decisions made on the use of best practice methods for catchment management are made on a sound basis. Much of the research and development is undertaken by Commonwealth funded bodies. It is imperative that research agency programs address all Australian situations and not just the more popular eastern seaboard catchments. Land and Water Resources Research and Development Corporation is one body that is addressing this issue equitably.

This is where an NRM framework (like that discussed at the start of this submission) is most useful. NRM frameworks perform the role of linking research and development and planning and implementation. As the NRM framework expands so too will the coordination and communication of best management practices. It is considered especially important that information from research and development reaches the local level.

An example of this scenario is the Bayswater Main Drain in Western Australia. The formation of a local catchment group led to the implementation of methods and a certain amount of social transition that led to a major reduction in nutrient levels discharging to the Swan River.



#### **4 THE ROLE OF DIFFERENT LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT, THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND THE COMMUNITY IN THE MANAGEMENT OF CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT**

The various roles of Government, the private sector and general community have been evolving rapidly in recent times. Through the operation of the National Heritage Trust, the Federal Government has hastened the development of NRM frameworks and the interaction of the various stakeholders. A Western Australian perspective of the roles is:

- Federal Government – Research and development, high-level policy development, financial support, national coordination and a facilitation of cross-jurisdictional synergy.
- State Government – Driving statewide policy and legislation, formation of state strategies and regional planning schemes, providing technical and professional support for the formation of regional strategies.
- Local Government – Implementation of practices through by-laws, regulations and town planning schemes. Evolving role in sustainable management of catchment through Agenda 21. In some remote areas where there is only one local government in the catchment, they may play a stronger role than where there are a number of local governments.
- Industry – provision of education and training through industry programs and sponsorship of local programs. Industry must also take a role in developing innovative ways to more sustainably use natural resources (eg rural adjustment for salinity control).
- Community – localised on ground action and implementation of practices. Also have a strategic role in influencing higher level policies and strategic plans.

In terms of the actual operation of a catchment group, it is important that there is good representation in the membership. An example of where this is working well is the previously mentioned sub regional group, Geocatch. This group was formed on the Water and Rivers Commission preferred model for catchment management. The group includes representation from, community, industry, state and local government. Geocatch has made its own submission please refer to that document.

Another example of stakeholders working together is the Swan Canning Clean-up Program. This program is a four-point action plan to improve the health of the Swan and Canning Rivers. The four points are:

1. Support ICM to reduce nutrients.
2. Improve Planning and land-use management to reduce nutrient input.
3. Modify river conditions to reduce algal blooms
4. Monitor river health; fill critical gaps in knowledge and report progress to the community.

This plan represents five years of research and included representation and input from industry, private research bodies, state and local government.

## 5 PLANNING, RESOURCING, IMPLEMENTATION, COORDINATION AND COOPERATION IN CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

The information for this matter has largely been dealt with in the previous sections, especially the first part. In short, the formation of a NRM framework would see that the issues in the above sub-headings are delivered. The points are summarised below.

- **Planning** – planning would be addressed through the development of regional strategies, sub-regional or catchment initiatives and local catchment plans. These plans would be developed in conjunction with state strategies developed by the key NRM agencies. The required content of the regional initiatives etc will be outlined in the State NRM policy (in development).
- **Resourcing** – whilst this has not been finalised, it is envisaged that:
  - Water and Rivers Commission will be the lead agency in wet catchments.
  - Agriculture WA in dry catchments.
  - Department of Conservation and Land Management in forest or reserve catchments, biodiversity issues and endangered species programs.
  - DEP for environmental targets.

Where an agency is the 'lead', it is expected that the organisation will provide administrative and professional support. This level of administrative support will be dependent on the level at which the catchment group operates (ie regional, sub regional or local catchment group). Final amounts would be negotiated with the support agency and signed off in a partnership agreement.

Funding for the whole framework might be derived from equal shares of State and Federal government or perhaps local government as well.

- **Implementation** – will be delivered in a coordinated manner via government agency programs and 'on the ground' projects undertaken by catchment groups in accordance with the regional or sub regional strategy for that catchment.
- **Coordination and cooperation.** – Coordination of roles in the NRM framework will be in accordance with the signed off partnership agreement. In this agreement, all parties will perform a clearly defined and focussed role as defined in the partnership agreement. The agreements will be fully negotiated so that there is consensus on roles etc before the signing of the document.

## **6 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**

Whilst the review and reporting on catchment management programs is important, especially at a regional and state level, care should be taken not to suffocate local catchment groups with endless amounts of paperwork and evaluation reporting.

If there are requirements for criteria to be measured (for State of the Environment reporting etc), then these should be incorporated into regional initiatives. That way when a new project is formed, it will be developed in accordance with that strategy and be undertaken as part of the project formulation. The added benefits of this mode of operation would be that the regional initiative would outline the use of best management practices that have been evaluated through research and development.

Another concern with evaluation and reporting of catchment management related achievements is that it is possible to measure output but not easy to measure outcomes. As outlined previously a large part of catchment management relates to the social transition of people changing their ways. The scale of this development may be long and extremely hard to measure. If such criteria are evaluated in the short term on an output basis then it may be reported that this method is not working when in fact it might be the most effective mode of operation.