

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

INQUIRY INTO CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

SUBMITTED BY:

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PREAMBLE

The Condamine Catchment Management Association (CCMA) believes that the review of water resource issues is appropriately conducted within the framework of Integrated Catchment Management (ICM). Thus, the CCMA provides the focus for sustainability within the catchment for all issues. However, the 'management' imperative requires definition; this is currently a key topic for investigation and community discussion within Queensland and those catchments within our section of the Murray Darling Basin in particular.

This submission will focus on the six key areas identified for the inquiry.

BACKGROUND

The Condamine Catchment Committee was formed in September 1992 (later incorporated as the Condamine Catchment Management Association or CCMA) as a result of community consultation on how ICM might be implemented in the Queensland section of the Murray-Darling Basin. The Committee is made up of 10 community members (skills base selection), and 4 special members (Department of Natural Resources, Department of Primary Industries, Environment Protection Agency/Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, and Darling Downs Local Government Association).

Since then a number of progressions have been made including incorporation in 1996 and the constant internal review of the way it conducts business. A major influence has been the development and on-going implementation of the Condamine Catchment Strategic Plan. This document was finalised in 1996 following extensive community consultation and is currently under review. This document has been used to promote sustainable resource management by identifying priority issues at the catchment level. Specific strategies and actions have also been developed to assist in the coordination of projects and on-ground activities.

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

Catchment management has been implemented by each state differently. The Queensland Integrated Catchment Management (ICM) initiative was set up in the early 1990's and remains virtually unchanged since then. The growth of the funded project management business in NRM has provided it with a valuable role in coordinating projects and ensuring these NRM projects align with Catchment Strategies.

There is no legislative underpinning for its role and no formal powers on which to act.

It exists as a very good idea – but will not advance without significant support. The Catchment is so obvious as the unit of management of water related issues that it requires no elaboration – just what administrative management structure for the catchment is still being explored.

One view is that a Catchment Management Association's (CMA) best use is as a community advisory board operating in tandem with the relevant Government agency and ensuring the community derived priorities and strategies are totally aligned with and addressed by the managing agency - then review and monitor. Whilst this view has general widespread acceptance to negate perceptions that the CMA's are an 'unofficial' arm of Government, there is another view that the CMA's should have a more active 'management' function. These are under very active discussion within the CCMA at present.

Currently, the CCMA has to come to grips with several NRM pressures such as: the Queensland Government's review of community involvement in NRM; vegetation management on freehold land; water allocation and management planning (WAMP); the 'CAP' on water and its review; the CCMA internal review of NRM and the Catchment Strategic Plan implementation; the involvement of industry, the community, Government agencies, and Local Government in NRM delivery; and the CCMA's relationship with local Landcare groups. Future NRM funding and the relationship between private and public benefit of NRM is an issue that will become foremost for all stakeholders in the near future.

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

The catchment approach has long been recognised as the fundamental unit of management when dealing with water issues. Catchment Management embraces all the natural features linked by the water flow as well as all the impacts of land use which affect the river. It is therefore particularly suitable when dealing with issues such as water quality management.

The CCMA strongly supports the ongoing acceptance of this concept to ensure that an integrated approach is taken when reviewing and resolving all issues associated with NRM.

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

Landcare groups, industry committees, local government, state government departments and community resource users, have recognised the need to address issues using a strategic planning approach. Natural resource management planning in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin (QMDB) focuses on the 'action planning' process and can be roughly defined at four levels. Each of these four levels of planning represent a partnership between community and government. These levels are critical to progress effective natural resource management in a manner that generates long-term commitment to well-planned, strategic and local actions.

An integrated approach to NRM began in the Queensland Murray–Darling Basin in the early 1990's. Key developments since then has included:

1. The development of the Queensland Murray–Darling Committee Inc. during the mid-90's. This Regional Committee provides strategic direction for regional NRM issues as defined by each of the Catchment Management Associations.
2. Each of the four CMA's have undertaken a strategic planning process which has resulted in State endorsed catchment strategies. These Catchment Strategies provide a framework of issues and priority actions for improved catchment management.
3. Sub-catchment action planning groups and Landcare groups utilise the Catchment Strategies to assist them in determining local actions that will result in implementation of catchment and local priorities. There are now 60 action planning groups that have been developed over the last 2 years. This represents 35% of the Region and over 2,000 landholders.
4. At the individual property level, there are many activities to assist improved NRM. The Property Management Planning process is one example which consists of an integrated workshop series to assist farming families to develop a property plan whilst importantly developing long term planning skills. To date over 400 farm families have completed the workshop series in the Region.

Action planning principles are employed at each planning level. Action planning is a tool used by community groups to identify the causes and possible solutions to address a range of NRM issues at a particular planning level. Action plans can be *integrated* or *issue* based. Integrated is the preferred option because all potential issues are considered, linkages between issues are identified, and detailed work plans for action are developed.

Action planning has been successful in this region as it provides an opportunity for all community members to have input into the decision making process. Action planning promotes cooperation among the community to solve natural resource problems as it results in a well thought out and targeted plans demonstrating how strategic on-ground projects, which are effective and value for money, will be implemented.

Examples include Best Management Practices for floodplain management at catchment and sub-catchment level. This is essential to halt degradation and achieve sustainability – currently this work is funded by NHT. It is imperative that this work continues. There is a need for continuing Federal Government funding for this and

other works. Hence, our previous comment about private and public benefit versus funding will soon become an all-consuming topic.

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

It is essential in any catchment management process that ALL stakeholders are actively involved.

Federal Government must continue to provide financial support to address catchment scale issues and set national standards. A political decision about the productivity and value of the agricultural sector may need to be re-stated in terms of ESD and the work already undertaken by the Sustainability Working Group on Agriculture. Sustainability (with the natural inference on 'long-term') is an issue that requires leadership and commitment at the highest level.

State Government – Strong support has been provided in assisting CMA's to develop and implement their strategic plans. A basic (\$10 000) annual grant has been integral to ensure that meetings can be held and that standard expenses incurred by Committee's members are reimbursed. State government has also provided office space where required. Currently in this region, State agencies are keen to pursue the integration of the strategic priorities identified in the catchment strategy into their own operational strategic priorities.

As the holders of an enormous amount of information it has been essential to ensure on-going linkages so that information being gathered and distributed to the community is done so in a manner that is deemed relevant and appropriate.

State Government must get the balance right between sound resource management and appropriate development – the old 'resource exploitation' or 'magic pudding' culture of resource management has left us with a legacy of environmental degradation in many areas.

Local Government – over recent years the involvement of local authorities has been slowly increasing. Some confusion has been expressed by local authorities re: what catchment management committee's actually do? In Queensland there is no legislative base that sets out the roles and responsibilities of CMA's. Consequently, CMA's throughout the State have each been developing their own structure and linkages to meet their own requirements.

As there is no legislative framework, the community supported and endorsed catchment strategies are not required to be considered for any new developments. Local Authorities through their planning schemes can determine land use as they wish (failing any Court challenge). It is recommended that it should be mandatory for Local Government to incorporate catchment strategic plans in their own planning processes.

The role of all 3 tiers of Government is vital.

Private Sector – there are enormous opportunities for the private sector to increase their involvement in catchment management. This can be done through sponsorship of activities or groups, or as contributions towards education and awareness. In Queensland, the impact of environmental licensing on NRM has been significantly overlooked as a key factor in sustainability. However, licences are not effective across all sectors and some other method such as BPEM or voluntary Environmental Management Systems and incentives are required.

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

We are currently in a quite advanced state of planning for natural resource management. As previously mentioned, the CCMA has developed a Catchment Strategic Plan which has been endorsed by the state since 1996. Some barriers have arisen re: its implementation eg: no statutory base, lack of resources (people, time funds), lack of coordination between stakeholders and, external socio-economic pressures being faced by landholders in the region.

These are all important aspects of the role of Catchment Management Association's. It is important to consider the need for regional associations if they only largely duplicate the role of local catchments committee's.

A serious threat at present is the possible removal of funding for our paid catchment coordinator (currently funded through NHT). This would have far reaching ramifications for the continued existence of catchment management for the Condamine Catchment as all community involvement is on a volunteer unpaid basis.

The greater issue of resources such as catchment evaluations, research information, development proposals, infrastructure etc. are all issues that affect NRM. CMA's do not have the ability to access all this information, process it, and take appropriate planning actions from the Catchment to farm level – it is extremely difficult. Thus, the co-operation of Government agencies, the involvement of all stakeholders, **and the appropriate resourcing of the CMA's has been recognised by the community as being absolutely essential to community participation in NRM in the Catchment.**

- **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**

The CCMA recognises that it is essential to get proper accountability for funding outcomes. To this end, the CCMA initiated a project to investigate the cost/benefits of NHT funded projects (due for completion mid-2000).

The previous paragraph on the integration of all stakeholders and the ability to process all the information is also appropriate in this section.

Finally, engaging the Catchment Community is the key to successful management. Ownership of catchment problems will bring responsibility for finding and adopting solutions. 'Grass roots' up management rather than more distant or bureaucratic 'top down' management must be the goal.

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