

Digby Jacobs
92 Junction St
DENILIQUIN NSW 2710
28 July 1999

Ian Dundas
Committee Secretary
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr. Dundas

Private Submission to the inquiry into catchment management

I would like to make a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage's inquiry into catchment management as a private citizen.

My family and I live in rural regional NSW whose prosperity and long term viability is directly linked with ecologically sustainable natural resource exploitation, and to redressing past unsustainable practices. We live on the Edward River whose health is important to us from recreational, productive, aesthetic and ecological points of view.

My submission is largely in terms of what I believe would work for the ecologies and communities in catchments, not a discussion on the current status of NSW catchment management practices or institutional structures.

My understanding of the management of ecologies extends to the belief that integrated catchment management and collective community responsibility for that management is essential.

It is also my belief that the responsibility for ecological management should form a part of a national social contract in which communities are encouraged to enhance their depth and strength through cross subsidisation for mutual benefit.

The inquiry's terms of reference include a number of points; some of which I wish to address in brief.

The value of a catchment approach to the management of the environment;

An integrated catchment approach to ecological management engenders dexterous thought processes and challenges planners to search for causes rather than symptoms.

Using an integrated catchment approach, planners are inclined to address root causes with management options in a systemic manner. This holistic approach devalues "patching up" problems (although some patching may be needed in the short term), and develops thorough management methodologies.

Integrated catchment approaches also tend to engender realistic (i.e. longer term) planning time frames and a project management culture in planners. Because of the nature of ecologies – often slow to respond to remedial actions – this is essential in establishing realistic goals.

Best practice methods of preventing, halting and reversing environmental degradation in catchments, and achieving environmental sustainability;

I believe that the jury's out on this one. I'd prefer to defer to precautionary principle and adaptive management using the best available knowledge at the time; and to continuous improvement. That is, we should be prepared to take risks and innovate in conjunction with present "best practice".

The role of different levels of government, the private sector and the community in the management of catchment areas; AND planning, resourcing, implementation, coordination and cooperation in catchment management

I believe that a change in the structure and nature of Australian government is necessary to improve the community's ability to plan for and act upon catchment management needs and to achieve the best value for money.

I believe that Australia is over burdened by the multiple levels of government which have come from administrative boundaries necessitated by turn of the century political paradigms and out moded communications methods. Duplication of responsibility and multiple funding levels are confusing to most, inefficient, and create cumbersome bureaucracies.

I advocate federally coordinated catchment based regional government i.e. **two** levels of government only. The regional government should have the responsibility for regional natural resource management planning and implementation – among other things.

Communities are, by definition, products of cross subsidisation and sharing of skills / values. The federal level of government should adhere to this principle and maintain a social contract, which at its core, should aim to strengthen community by cross subsidisation to differing degrees at all soico - economic and ecological levels. This is, I admit, in conflict with the "user pays" principal. However, "user pays" presumes ability to pay and can ignore those who are unable or unwilling.

Private enterprise will remain market driven but it should also be encouraged to be physically, socially and financially responsible to the ecologies in which it produces and pollutes and to which it distributes. It also should only have to respond to one level of planning legislation so that its development is unhindered by multiple bureaucratic layers.

All Australians should pay for catchment management through an environmental levy on goods and services. This should be distributed transparently by the federal government and administered by a community based catchment management body at the regional level.

The catchment management body should be constituted of regional people who are of sufficient expertise, who reflect the constituency of the region, and who are responsible for the strategic distribution of and accounting for funds to natural resource projects. This body should align to regional government but not be a part of it, in much the same way as NSW Catchment Management Committees currently relate to the NSW State Government.

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.

Monitoring and reporting is currently the responsibility of agencies, businesses and academic institutions who have an interest in the resource. They often contract between one another and are often required to report based on contractual or project parameters. They aren't always linked to catchment strategies nor do they always measure / report on parameters which are necessary to management or understanding.

The community based catchment management body should direct monitoring activities to the most appropriate providers (cooperative research centres, universities, private enterprise and so on) as a part of the projects they administer. This body should have first instance custody of the data they collect and information they create. Data should comply with federal standards, but be locally "owned". Catchment strategies should be the basis for any monitoring programs and methods.

Any catchment health review needs to consider current catchment status as well as the ecological and community (including socio – economic, and cultural) effects of management actions. The community based catchment management body should be the reviewer in the first instance and reference should be made to the social contract and its key result areas.

As to the timing for reviews and improvement, ecological processes appear to be slow and any review time frame needs to consider this. I have already stated that natural resource management should adhere to a principal of continuous improvement which would mean that individual projects are constantly reviewed in a shorter time frame than that of an overall catchment strategy.

I am making this submission on the basis that I feel that there is need for fundamental changes in the way the natural resource is managed, in the way in which we are governed, and in the way in which Australians support their ecologies. If there are any questions I would be more than happy to respond.

Sincerely

Digby Jacobs