

Goulburn Valley Environment Group Inc.

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Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage Inquiry into Catchment Management

To whom it concerns,

On the basis of recent experience with catchment management authorities in northern Victoria are group would like to draw your attention to the following issues with regards to catchment management.

Benefits of Catchment-based management in the Goulburn-Broken Catchment

- 1 We strongly support the notion of catchment based management as it provides a more effective and more natural basis for management than some of the artificial boundaries used by other government agencies.
- 2 The requirement for community membership on the CMA Board and its various implementation committees provides a measure of local input and a sense of community across the catchment.
- 3 The use of catchments as management units has allowed for strategic management of nutrient and water quality issues throughout the catchment.

Flaws of catchment based management as it occurs in Victoria

- 1 The CMA structure is not democratic.
 - Board members are appointed by the Minister
 - The majority of Board members must earn their living from the land, meaning that decision-making is dominated by primary industry interests
 - There is no legislative requirement for the Board or committees to include representatives of other, important land-management agencies (e.g. Parks Victoria)
 - There is no legislative requirement for the Board or committees to include representatives of other interest groups such as the environment groups.
 - There is no legislative requirement for the Board or committees to include independent scientists with knowledge of natural resource management issues.
- 2 There is confusion between the CMAs and the other land-management agencies as to who has responsibility for different parcels of land or land-management issues. At times, the CMA appears to be mostly involved with private land issues. At other times, it takes responsibility for public land (e.g. the management of water frontages licenced for grazing)
- 3 Precisely because the CMA Board and committees do have community representation (albeit mostly from the primary industry sector), they are unwilling to regulate or prosecute activities which may harm themselves, their neighbours or their constituency. For instance, even though biologists have demonstrated an urgent need for environmental flows in the Goulburn River, the Goulburn-Broken CMA will not advocate for an

- environmental flow allocation because its membership consists primarily of farmers, irrigators or agency staff associated with the irrigation industry.
- 4 In similar vein to 3, it is of concern that the CMAs co-ordinate NHT grant applications, with the majority of funding not going to genuine community group projects but to large agency projects associated with the irrigation industry.
- 5 The rise of the CMAs has happened at the expense of government departments involved in natural resource management. There is consequently a risk of the government departments becoming even weaker in policy and monitoring, and a risk of lack of auditing of the CMA's works.

Recommendations

Our group broadly supports the concept of catchment-based management but believe that changes are required to make the management agencies more accountable and more effective. In particular, we recommend that

- The membership of the CMA Boards and committees need to be more clearly defined to ensure that there is representation of all land management agencies and interest groups (e.g. Parks, Forests, water, Land).
- The roles and responsibilities of the different land management agencies need to be clearly defined.
- There needs to be a much stronger provision of scientific expertise on the Board and committees. While community representation is also vital, it seems a flawed process that a group of unqualified people can make major decisions about natural resource management.
- The Boards need to be made more accountable than in Victoria and auditing of their actions needs to be undertaken annually.

We hope that these comments are of value.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Doug Robinson (Acting President)