



INQUIRY INTO CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

The West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority is pleased to be able to submit to the Inquiry and trusts that its experience at a Regional level will make a positive contribution.

This brief submission is complementary to the submission being prepared by Dr. Jane Doolan of the Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment and will provide a Regional perspective.

Development of Catchment Management in Australia

The catchment approach to natural resource management commenced in early 1995 in this Region with the establishment of the West Gippsland Catchment and Land Protection Board.

One of the primary purposes of the C.A.L.P. Board was to prepare a Regional Catchment Strategy which:

- Described the Region
- Identified the natural resources
- Highlighted the value of the resources
- Listed the pressures on the catchment
- Assessed the catchment condition
- Identified the processes and impacts of degradation
- Described current management and programs
- Developed a vision, objectives and priorities
- Negotiate future management arrangements including
 - partnership arrangements
 - cost sharing
 - monitoring and evaluation

Following the Government endorsement of the Regional Catchment Strategy in 1998, the C.A.L.P. Board was replaced by the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority whose charter is the implementation of the Regional Catchment Strategy through the effective integration and delivery of land and water programs.

Value of a Catchment Approach

The experience in our Region has clearly demonstrated the value of a catchment approach to natural resource management.

Although still in an early stage of development, significant gains can be demonstrated from this approach. Some of the benefits are:

- Development of partnership approaches between stakeholders rather than duplication; competition and avoidance of responsibility.

- Complementary project developments.
- Targetting of priorities
- Developing community links and ownership
- Co-ordination of programs
- Cost sharing
- Value adding to each others activities.

At a Regional level there has been an ever growing realisation that the catchment approach, facilitated and co-ordinated by the CMA, is essential to ensure that sustainable resource management is undertaken and that degradation is addressed. This approach is supported by all key stakeholders, including:

- Landcare/Landholders
- Local Government
- Water Authorities
- Industry e.g. forestry, power generation, agriculture
- Government departments and instrumentalities

Attached is a copy of the Regional Structure of the CMA which depicts how the Authority has “pulled together” the various stakeholders to achieve our purposes.

Environmental Sustainability

The achievement of environmental sustainability is a goal which is extremely important to achieve. However, degradation of the catchment has occurred over a long time frame and cannot be reversed overnight.

Many practices which have led to degradation were undertaken without the understanding of their impact on the catchment. Subsequent research, knowledge and scientific and technological advances have provided the information necessary to address these issues. However, changing practices and developing community understanding of the complex links and relationships of catchment management issues is a difficult process which required strong community education and awareness raising programs to ensure “ownership: of the solution is achieved.

Much research and development of best practice management is still required to ensure that current knowledge gaps are filled and adopted by landholders.

Roles

There is no question that the effective achievement of sustainable catchment management can only be attained through the combined efforts of all levels of government, the private sector and the community.

One of the most crucial aspects to the establishment of roles is the need to take a long-term, strategic view which transcends vested interest, political imperatives and short-term “fixes”.

The model of Catchment Management Authorities now established in Victoria is an excellent one which is working very well. However, to ensure that this continues, it is crucial that a strong, ongoing partnership be maintained between Federal and State Government, the private sector and the community and that adequate continuing funding be provided to ensure that degradation is prevented, halted and reversed.

The roles of each of the sectors currently is not particularly clear at the Regional level. Our view of the roles is:

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Federal Government: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International/national policy setting - Provision of funding direct to CMA's through a guaranteed share of taxation revenue aimed at broad strategic outcomes and not at small local solutions. (This would replace the current NHT program.) - National monitoring and evaluation |
| State Government: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - State policy setting - Management of Government land - Provision of funding for specific programs and projects - Research - State monitoring and evaluation - Broad oversight of CMA |
| CMA's: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-ordination/facilitation of catchment management at the Regional level. - Raising of funding from Regional community via a tariff/levy - Developing and implementing Regional Action Plans - Advising State and Federal Government on policy matters relating to catchment management. - Regional monitoring and evaluation - Developing links and partnerships with other agencies e.g. local government, water authorities, EPA, the community e.g. Landcare and the private sector to ensure a co-ordinated approach and best practice methods are adopted. |
| Private Sector: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Forming of partnerships to deliver better management practices. |
| Community: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementing best management practices - Forming partnerships for on-ground works - Sharing in funding through a tariff - Influencing the direction of Regional - Oversight of program delivery through CMA structure |



There is no doubt that a “bottom up” approach to catchment management is the most beneficial model to ensure that sustainable use and protection of the natural resource base is maintained. It therefore makes good sense to ensure that empowerment is given to the lowest possible level whilst maintaining a whole of catchment focus.

Monitoring and Evaluation

This is one of the most important aspects of a catchment approach which is critical to establishing the progress (or otherwise) which is being made from the investment in catchment management and the practices being undertaken.

It is an area which is not easy, as many of the outcomes will only be measurable in the longer term. There is also a lack of consistent and agreed methodology and techniques.

A catchment is the most appropriate unit for the primary undertaking of this function. If a consistent approach is taken, these can be aggregated up to State and National reporting.

Summary

It has now been well established, through our experience to date, that a catchment management approach to natural resource management is the best model to achieve a sustainable use, protection and restoration of our natural resources.

Facilitation and co-ordination at a catchment level is extremely important to ensure that management practices and investment are appropriate, well directed and fund utilised efficiently and effectively.

Experience has also shown that the community is very supportive of this model and that the only issue causing significant contention is that of cost sharing.