

## HUGHES CREEK CATCHMENT COLLABORATIVE

Our organisation is made up of four LandCare groups in central Victoria which have collaborated to produce a LandCare strategy and are now involved in implementing it. The focus of our concern is the sub-catchment of Hughes Creek which rises at Terip Terip in the Strathbogie Ranges and flows into the Goulburn at Mangalore.

This submission is based on our experience as a local community group in North East Victoria, where catchment-based community action has been practised for about fifteen years.

### . DEVELOPMENT OF CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT IN AUSTRALIA

Even in areas with a successful [leading edge] Catchment Management Authority, [CMA] such as the Goulburn-Broken CMA in northern Victoria, there is scant recognition of its work and some resentment to the small taxes it imposes. Most people identify with a community rather than a catchment.

Catchment management agencies may be more widely recognised if local communities had a formal involvement in the selection of members, perhaps through nominations by local government.

### . THE VALUE OF THE CATCHMENT APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Most rural land managers recognise the integrity of their catchments and the importance of having an agreed catchment strategy.

More often than not a catchment will have similar or linked environmental characteristics which will make it an optimal land unit for environmental and agricultural matters. Most catchments need to be further sub-divided into more or less homogeneous land management units.

### . BEST PRACTICE

We have strong reservations about the concept of "best practice", because we fear that it may lead to rigid uniformity in circumstances where diversity is the norm and innovation is highly desirable.

We would be content to suggest that successful environmental restoration will involve joint efforts by the doers [mainly

private landholders], the experts [usually staff of government agencies] and a support structure familiar with the problems of the catchment [ideally a catchment management agency with financial resources and a strategy to boot]. Management involves a number of elements which include setting objectives, making plans, obtaining resources, implementation, monitoring and revision. Best practice is good management.

#### . ROLE OF GOVERNMENTS

Our governments have been the major cause of our environmental disasters through the selection acts, closer settlement schemes, irrigation projects etc. Therefore, they have a major responsibility in fixing them.

The present generation of land managers has inherited an enormous task, one which the rural economy cannot underwrite without help. Governments need to guarantee that adequate funding is maintained for as long as needed. In addition, they should ensure that relevant scientific and technical work on mending the environment continues to offer solutions and insight.

An important first step for governments, which is often bypassed, is to listen to the farmers and foresters of Australia so as to understand their problems and the solutions they propose.

Too often, governments march in with wonderful solutions, such as the "billion trees" fiasco, which wasted precious community resources on cosmetics. The outcome of the introduction of the Calici-virus [which would be many more than a billion stems of native vegetation] has shown that the most effective solutions require us to first recognise the problems.

In most parts of rural Australia there are too few people to mend the country and care for it adequately; governments should attempt attract more "stake-holders" to the cause of actually doing something to restore environmental health.

A catchment management agency can develop a focussed view of the needs of its catchment which neither the generalised approach of state government agencies nor the parochial outlook of local government can.

State and local governments will typically divide a catchment with their boundaries, a factor which tends to limit their role in catchment management.

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

**Catchments need real planning** NOT town-planning. Town-planning is a way of allocating land, which is a scarce resource in towns, to competing users. In rural areas, land is abundant and people to look after it are scarce. People need positive encouragement to care for the land not the petty-fogging rules favoured by town-planners.

**Management is impossible without resources.** Therefore, CMA's need adequate resources.

**The bulk of the work of environmental restoration will be implemented by farmers.** For work undertaken by the LandCare movement, funding is available through the Natural heritage Trust [NHT] through a complicated process involving a hierarchy of assessment panels, each one successively more remote from the proposed community actions. To be successful in the quest for NHT funding, farmers who are the backbone of the LandCare movement, must be able to describe their diverse proposals in a stereotypical form designed to allow easy marking at the final examination stage. Also, they must be conversant with the intricacies of Commonwealth-State financial relations.

In the time available under the bureaucratic timetable, the assessment panels must then try to understand the circumstances that lie behind the diverse applications for funding. Overall, this process is an immense waste of time; it is even counter-productive because LandCare groups [the practical end of much environmental restoration] are withdrawing from the process.

The optimal way to allocate NHT funds would be to allocate most of the money directly to catchment management authorities for distribution to LandCare groups under a formula complementing that now applied to the states. CMA's are closer to the problems and are in touch with LandCare collectives. A CMA would have to develop a catchment strategy to qualify for funding.

There is very little follow-up to the projects funded [particularly on the ground] and monitoring, if any, is ineffective.

#### . MONITORING, EVALUATING & REPORTING

The main agency for this sort of work should be the ABS through its Agricultural Census's and related surveys. Currently, the ABS publishes its results for Local Government Areas [lga's] and aggregations of lga's. Except as a source of "nice-to-know" information, this work is irrelevant because local governments have little or nothing to do with environmental or agricultural management.

**We regard it as self-evident that catchment management programs must be monitored for the areas of the catchments and their sub-catchments which are being managed.**

We suggest that in the March 2000 agricultural census the bureau should ask of the respondents "what sub-catchment and sub-catchment is your property in?" [Up to now the bureau has asked each farmer in Australia every year "what shire are you in?"] We are sure that State agriculture or catchment management agencies could provide a list or menu suitable for respondents to the census.

Once the locations of units of farmland are related to their sub-catchments, that information could be used to monitor

catchment and sub-catchments. If injected into the mass of historical census data it would be a basis for research relating farming activities to environmental outcomes.

There is also an important role for satellite imagery in measuring environmental parameters. On-ground assessments tend to be expensive and therefore, limited in scope and frequency. We suggest that a program to develop techniques for the measurement of environmental parameters by satellite should be given a high priority and appropriate funding on a national level.