

House of Representatives Standing Committee on environment and Heritage Inquiry into catchment management.

A submission by the Bellinger Catchment Management Committee (BCMC)

Issue

This submission is in response to a House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage inquiry into catchment management.

Background

The Bellinger Catchment is one of the 11 catchments of the North Coast NSW region and it covers an area of approximately 1,100 sq.km. The neighbouring catchments of the Bellinger catchment are the Nambucca catchment to the south, the Clarence to the north west and Coffs Harbour waterways to the north east.

The two main rivers in the Catchment are the Kalang River (330sq km) to the south and the Bellinger river (780sq.km.) to the north. Much of the catchment is covered by forest with over 60% of the catchment is either National Park or in State Forests.

Landuse in the catchment is primarily associated with grazing, cropping, rural residential development, dairy farming, fishing, tourism, oyster farming and increasingly horticultural enterprises.

The Bellinger CMC was established in 1994 under the *NSW Catchment Management Act 1989*. Previous to its formation Bellinger Shire Council had formed its own Catchment Management Advisory body and realised then the benefits of an integrated approach to natural resource management. At present there are 13 community members, 2 local government representatives and 5 State Government representatives on the BCMC representing a diversity of interests and perspective's.

The intent of the BCMC identified in our draft Business Plan has been to:

- coordinate sustainable natural resource management in the catchment
- influence natural resource management and funding allocation in the catchment
- provide leadership for natural resource management
- provide information via networking
- provide investment via funding bodies

We want to:

- guide the sustainable natural resource management agenda
- engender local attitudinal change towards sustainability
- provide a forum for debate and exploration of issues
- add value to other organisations planning and activities

The BCMC has achieved much over its last five years in natural resource management in the catchment including:

- the co-ordination and implementation of the Black-Willow control program
- development of an information brochure on river rehabilitation.
- co-ordination of a joint Bellinger and Nambucca catchments water quality monitoring program.
- working in-conjunction with Bellinger Shire Council to address vegetation management issues in the catchment including the management of native vegetation along the riparian zone and environmental weed management.
- conducting a review of available water quality information for the Bellinger. This study provided the State Government with one of the few information bases for water quality on the North Coast that could be used for the Stressed River Assessment - Estuarine and Riverine.
- undertaking a community workshop on estuarine erosion management in conjunction with DLWC and the local Estuary Management Committee
- undertaking a Water Borne Disease seminar to discuss organisms such as Cryptosporidium and Giardia and others and their relationship to water quality management.
- funding the production of septic tank suitability maps for the Bellinger Shire. These maps are now used in planning and the Development Application process.
- funding and supporting Bellinger Shire Council in the development of the first Roadside Management Plan for any North Coast Council.
- funding numerous on ground projects in strategically significant areas. Organised for the Bellinger and Dorrigo area to develop a Landcare steering body and to have a Landcare coordinator funded.
- funding the development of a Dairy laneway hard surfacing demonstration site. The CMC has encouraged and funded the Dorrigo Mt Top Landcare group to try an alternate surfacing method for dairy lane ways.
- funding Bellinger Shire Council to undertake an inspection of septic tanks in close proximity to waterways

The examples listed above reflects the important influence the BCMC has had on natural resource management in the catchment.

Terms of reference

Development of catchment management in Australia

Catchment Management Committees (CMCs) in NSW were established under *the Catchment Management Act 1989* as part of the Total Catchment Management (TCM) Program, which operates under the banner “community and government working together”.

The Bellinger Catchment has been particularly successful in developing partnerships between the community and state and local government agencies responsible for natural resource and environmental management.

It has established and maintained a process of local community input into government policies, cost effective delivery of community consultation, coordinating of resources to priority issues and projects and facilitating on-ground change.

Value of catchment approach to management of the environment

The major value of a catchment approach is the sense of active community participation and local ownership of both issues and their solutions. This is reflected in the strong links between landcare (other ‘Care’ groups) and Catchment Management. The Landcare community are the cornerstone of on-ground implementation of the catchment process.

With the plethora of specific issue Natural Resource Environmental Management committees currently in operation, the TCM model offers a holistic approach and allows for the efficient use of the community’s limited resources.

The CMC has worked diligently to gather information that will allow for educated decision making with regard to river management in the Bellinger Catchment. The CMC provides a vital link between the Mid-North Coast Water Management Committee and the Bellinger community through its local knowledge and community networks.

The CMC has supported and co-ordinated the development of best environmental management practices, and methods of preventing, halting and reversing environmental degradation in the catchment, and achieving environmental sustainability.

Smaller area based CMC’s have close contact with community members and have a better understanding of local natural resource management issues.

BCMC has a strong relationship with Bellingen Shire Council and are working jointly on a vegetation management project looking at the riparian zone of the Bellinger and Kalang Rivers.

In Summary

The operation of the BCMC on the North Coast of NSW have added substantially to the sustainable management of natural resources and environment through improved coordination and integration, better communication, effective community participation and the potential for reduced complexity and efficient processes for plan making and review.

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