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The Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee
On Environment and Heritage
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

House of Representatives Inquiry into Catchment Management.

Submission from Georges River Catchment Committee.

Georges River Catchment Committee (GRCMC) was established in August 1991 under the NSW Catchment Management Act 1989, with the aim to foster " the co-ordinated and sustainable use of land, water, vegetation and other natural resources on a catchment basis so as to balance resource utilisation and conservation". Membership of this committee is drawn from land users and owners in the catchment, and representatives from councils, state agencies and environmental groups. Membership has a majority of land users and owners.

The Georges River catchment has an area of 920 square km. and varies in land use with virgin bush conservation areas, water catchment, agricultural uses, industrial, and urban residential. There are a million people living within the catchment.

The members of the GRCMC consider the inquiry into Catchment Management important and put forward the following submissions for consideration.
For brevity I have made a list of relevant points as follows;-

- Catchment management cannot be just about water quality and water flow, but has to be about the health of the total natural resource system, of which water is a very important part and indicator. To achieve healthy waterways we must have healthy catchments.
- With the present condition of catchments, the government does not have enough money and resources to rectify catchment degradation. The government need not only community moral support but the material support of the community.
- There are two aspects involved with catchment rehabilitation.
 1. Identifying and stopping degrading processes.
 2. Repairing degradation that has already occurred.

- Little can be achieved if there is not a common vision and a coordinated plan.
- A realistic vision and a well defined plan involve many trade offs,
 - (a) development against non development.
 - (b) Individual rights against community benefit.
 - (c) Short term advantage against long term sustainability
 - (d) Cultural practice against other environmental improvement.
 to name a few.
- The body or forum that decides the values that will determine the vision and decides on the compromises, needs to be seen to be fair, non political, and particularly open, if the community are to have ownership, and hence support for its decisions.
- Each state has its own form of catchment management, with various advantages and disadvantages.
- NSW Catchment Management has been an outstanding success on the local level, but fallen down badly in the regional and state wide coordination.
- Catchment Management Committees that have a majority community composition are accepted well by community, business, and agency, and generally have a clear view as to where they are going. The state wide coordination by a more bureaucratic committee has not been effective. The appearance of informal regional committees, initiated from the CMCs has now started to effectively approach regional issues.
- State agencies being focused on their own individual responsibilities, are not appropriate to control catchment management in a state. Catchment management should be seen to be not favouring one point of view or group and so should be directly responsible directly to the Premier or a minister who is only responsible for the coordination of catchment management.

Some further points expressed by Sharyn Cullis, a Community representative, and member for 9 years.

- Current legislative powers need to be evaluated, eg. The Catchment Management Act as in NSW imposes no mandatory powers, and relies on the goodwill of agencies and councils to comply with its principles re Sustainability. This means in practice its success is limited. Catchment management should have an overriding and co-ordinating function. This has been recognised but not achieved.
- Catchment management principles need to emphasise Environmental Sustainability, and inter-generational equity in terms of resource use.
- Catchment management should not be seen as purely a framework for the management of water quality and water allocations rights between competing

users. The need for ecological flows is also of utmost importance, and needs equal recognition. In other words, all values of rivers should be considered in both the short and long term.

- Catchments can be used as a framework for managing water, land use and biodiversity.
- In relation to land-use planning, reference should be made to any relevant land-use planning instruments of Georges River and Hawkesbury Nepean REPs and their effectiveness should be evaluated.
- The catchment management framework and reporting needs also to be related to mandatory State of the Environment reporting as it exists in certain states eg NSW, and to existing inquiries eg Healthy Rivers Commission in NSW, and any other river management infrastructure, so as to avoid duplication.
- Major causes of water degradation need to be defined, and solutions recommended.
- This inquiry is relevant to urban as well as rural catchments.
- In resourcing initiatives, assessment criteria need to be broad. It is not just size of the river or the catchment that matters. Other important factors include population size, population diversity, diversity of water use, degree of degradation of water and other catchment resources.
- The immense social, environmental and long term costs imposed by some hugely water intensive industries within the context of the ours being the earth's driest continent, should be critically assessed against short term economic gain.

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From Ian Ford , a land holder / land user, and member for 9 years:

The State approach to management of water resources has developed on an as needs basis. NSW attempted to rationalise these approaches in 1991 with the establishment of committees such as this (GRCMC)but ther has been little progress to coordinate the state wide. Each catchment focuses on micro issues and the big picture is left to a meeting of representatives (Chairpersons) infrequently through the year. There is little information from other states.

This approach focuses the stake holders on the problem of their area but this is diluted by reduction of focus by the development of smaller committees (sub committees) looking at less and less. This absorbs a large resource in man hours for little result.

The best practice result is to develop a national plan to prevent the addition of pollutants into the water and then to restore the rivers and lakes and control the use of the waters.

The government role in most areas, are to control and store water for use and control and pollutants produced as a result of civilisation and peoples expectation to the style and value of life.

People are pollution and it is the attitude that determines how much. Government at all levels, can influence this by their actions. The community responds to measures that are simple and easy and can be educated to that end. Do we have to take home our shopping in a sheaf of plastic bags? We used to use string bags, the same one for years and years, now we expect the store to provide free an expensive non-degradable pollutant for the same job. The government is too political to level all stores to the same competitive field and stop this, and re-educate the community. This function extends to industry and farmers. The controls are not simple and standard.

The resourcing and implementation in catchment management is the crux of the matter, all the rest is really motherhood statements and wish lists.

Of the models that are in place the self funding trust system seems to produce an integrated result. The problem is to provide and cost a solution and then find the funds to implement it How is this achieved?

Man has the ability to solve most problems given time. How can we now expect the degradation of a hundred years to be reversed even in a generation? Planning should be nationwide and for a long term solution as this generation should have to pay to immediately return the country into a pristine state.

To evaluate the program is not difficult. When fish live and people swim, the waters are clear and drinking water pure, like it was 60 years ago. Then we have made a start.

This is not a technical, how to fix submission but an invitation for federal Australian approach to Catchment Management as I think State government has lost its way.

In conclusion.

In NSW, Catchment Management Committees have been effective in dealing with catchment issues on a catchment basis. On a regional and state wide basis however, less has been achieved, due probably to the lack of coordination of the catchment committees. The State Catchment Coordinating Committee (SCMCC) seems to lack vision. Rather than being a centre of communication for the 43 catchment management committees, SCMCC has been distant from the community. Catchment management committees have formed their own informal peer groups, to fill the gap, but this has been slow to happen and less effective than a properly resourced body.

SCMCC needs to reflect more the spirit of community ownership. With a majority of CMC representatives on the SCMCC and a vision of "acting as a hub for communicating between the community, government and the agencies", we could have a really effective system of Catchment Management in the state. We could expect to hear more of what is being achieved in the catchments, more of what the governments money is doing, and better coordination of strategi plannig across the state or the nation.

The great advantages of NSW style Catchment Management, is that the committees have no power, and so they are non threatening. Membership of a committee has no

real financial reward, and very little kudos. The committees have to work by persuasion, which usually requires addressing the needs of all affected parties, and the members are result driven as satisfaction is the only reward.

The remaining issue that needs addressing is Government support. As CMCs have no power it is imperative the government direct that the strategic plans of Catchment Committees, and regional and state organisations will be used in conjunction of agencies and other government organisations.

Although I have been critical of the NSW system, it seems to have the greatest potential of the systems of the various states, and although at the moment it is very cost effective, some by some restructuring will give much greater results with little or no added cost.

Please feel free to ask for any further information or clarification. We may be contacted through the coordinator, as listed above.

Yours sincerely
Robert Michie

Chair, Georges River Catchment Committee