

Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage Inquiry into catchment management

A Submission by the Hastings Camden Haven Catchment Management Committee (CMC)

Background

The Hastings Camden Haven Catchment Management Committee (CMC) operates on the mid north coast of New South Wales. The catchment over which it operates has an area of 4,485 square kilometres, comprising approximately 30% State Forests, 15% National Parks and 55% freehold land. About 70% of the catchment is forested. The population is 70,000, of which close to half live in Port Macquarie which lies at the mouth of the Hastings River.

The CMC comprises 19 members who represent the following interests: beef cattle; farm forestry; forestry; oyster growing; education; dairy farming; mixed biodynamic farming; horticulture; Landcare; urban living; conservation; local government; and state government (Department of Land and Water Conservation, State Forests, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Environment Protection Authority).

Further information about the catchment and the activities of the CMC are outlined in Enclosure 1 - "Hastings Camden Haven Catchment Management Committee Catchment Plan". Note that some details in the enclosure have changed since printing.

Terms of Reference

1. The development of catchment management in Australia

Catchment Management Committees in NSW are established under the Catchment Management Act 1989 as part of the Total Catchment Management (TCM) program, which has the slogan "community and government working together". **Enclosure 2 is the brochure "The TCM Approach", which provides more information about the development of catchment management in NSW, including the TCM program, TCM legislation, and the objectives, functions and membership of Catchment Management Committees.**

The Hastings Camden Haven CMC was established in 1993 and since then has made considerable progress in the development of catchment management. It has been particularly successful in establishing and cementing links between the community and state and local government agencies responsible for natural resource management (NRM). **The CMC's achievements in this area, as well as in natural resource management policy and planning and on-ground project development are outlined in Enclosure 3 - "Report of Achievements Hastings Camden Haven CMC 1995-96 to 1997-98.**

2. The value of a catchment approach to the management of the environment

The TCM program was established in recognition of the fact that the majority of natural resource issues within the landscape ultimately manifest themselves in some form of impact on our creeks, rivers, swamps and lakes. Land, water and biodiversity issues cannot be affectively dealt with in isolation because of the interrelationships between them, and this is why the catchment approach to management of the environment has been successful.

Catchment Management Committees play a crucial role in coordinating development of solutions to these issues within catchments, and the relationship between community and government members of these committees is an integral part of their success.

3. Best practice methods of preventing, halting and reversing environmental degradation in catchments, and achieving environmental sustainability.

The Catchment Management Committee has a strategic plan which identifies 5 key goals for the catchment. **These are outlined in Enclosure 1.** The CMC is currently reviewing the plan, and has prioritised all “threatening or degrading processes” operating in the catchment. Outcomes and actions for each of these processes are being developed.

The CMC has held many field days and forums over its lifetime, dealing with priority issues including riverbank management, water quality and river flow, weed control, irrigation and farm water supply best practice.

The CMC actively supports the Landcare program in the catchment, which is home to 25 Landcare Groups who are actively working in both rural and urban areas to protect and rehabilitate the environment, with an emphasis on riparian zone management. The CMC reviews funding applications by these groups and recommends funding priorities. It is also able to directly allocate \$30,000 per year in small project funding to community groups working on best practice methods of environmental management. Up to 20 projects in any one year are supported through these small project funds.

The CMC is however concerned at proposed reductions in the level of support available to the Landcare program through the employment of Landcare Coordinators. These positions are essential to support of groups and the program will not work as effectively without them. Landcare Coordinators should be employed under common conditions across Australia - this is not the case at present and there are considerable anomalies in employment conditions and the number of groups each Coordinator supports. These issues are critical and require Commonwealth action.

While all of the above activities are under way, the CMC is also concurrently directly involved with or supporting several projects that will enhance our knowledge of environmental degradation in the catchment. These projects include: water quality monitoring (this is a joint project of the CMC with Hastings Council); soils, soil erosion and land use mapping; vegetation mapping and planning; and river management planning.

The CMC has commenced a project to bring together the information from these projects in the development of sub-catchment and whole farm plans, leading to implementation of best practice land management as the result of improved awareness and education, and the use of land management incentives for landowners working on activities that benefit the wider community.

4. The role of different levels of government, the private sector and the community in the management of catchment areas.

Catchment Management Committees in NSW comprise representatives of state and local government, the private sector and the “general community”, **as outlined in Enclosure 2**. One of the strengths of the TCM program is that CMC’s have this mix of members, and there are benefits to all these groups as a result. Improved communication, awareness and education of all groups is an outcome of CMC’s, with the environment the ultimate beneficiary as through the TCM process there is increased awareness and coordination of natural resource management activities.

Government and the private sector have the opportunity, through the TCM process, to bring to the wider community a range of their own NRM issues, and in turn to take home a better understanding of community views of these issues. In turn the community has the opportunity to raise its own issues relevant to state and local government, and ultimately the combined representation of all levels of membership brings better solutions.

5. Planning, resourcing, implementation, coordination and cooperation in catchment management.

Catchment Management Committees sit under the State Catchment Management Coordinating Committee (SCMCC). The TCM program has as its host agency the Department of Land and Water Conservation (DLWC), which provides a TCM Secretariat. All report to the Minister for Land and Water Conservation.

The SCMCC’s objective is to “provide a central coordinating mechanism for the purpose of total catchment management throughout New South Wales”. Its functions include to:-

- ⇒ coordinate the implementation of total catchment management strategies
- ⇒ monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of total catchment management strategies
- ⇒ Coordinate the functioning of CMC’s

Additional NRM committees in NSW include: recently established Water and Vegetation committees, which are also responsible to the DLWC portfolio and whose responsibility it is to prepare management plans as part of the government’s reforms in these areas; and Estuary, Floodplain and Coastal committees who come under the jurisdiction of local government.

The Minister is currently reviewing this NRM committee structure. There has been considerable discussion in relation to this review by the 11 CMC’s within the Commonwealth Government’s Natural Heritage Trust north coast region. There is a view amongst this group of CMC’s that both the SCMCC and TCM Secretariat have been ineffective, with contributing factors being inadequate resourcing of the Secretariat, and inadequate commitment by government member agencies.

This ineffectiveness is evidenced by another review, carried out in 1996-97 into the TCM program at the instigation of the Minister for Land and Water Conservation. The government’s response to that review was published in December 1997 in the booklet “Outcomes of the review of Total Catchment Management in New South Wales”. The Outcomes document contained 35 Actions, including 10 Actions involving the development of Strategies, Guidelines, Programs and Plans, mostly involving the SCMCC and its Secretariat. The CMC is not aware of the completion of any of these 10 Actions, 5 of which are relevant to this term of reference. In fact Action 35 states that “A detailed implementation plan for the actions identified during the TCM review will be developed jointly by the Government and the SCMCC early in 1998”, and the CMC has not seen any evidence of this plan. The 5 Actions relevant to this term of reference are:-

Action 4: “A strategy to improve integration between State Government agencies and TCM programs will be jointly developed by those Government agencies and the SCMCC”.

Action 5: “A strategy to achieve greater participation and commitment of Local Government to TCM will be jointly developed by SCMCC and Local Government”.

Action 6: “The Department of Land and Water Conservation, in consultation with the Departments of Urban Affairs and Planning (DUAP) and Local Government, will examine possible strategies and procedures to promote consistency and compatibility between CMC and CMT strategies and policies, and the requirements of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (1979) and the Local Government Act (1993)”.

Action 7: “A strategy to improve the relationship between CMC’s and estuary, floodplain and coastal management committees will be jointly developed and implemented by the Departments of Local Government and Land and Water Conservation and the SCMCC”.

Action 8: “A community awareness program for TCM which highlights the links between TCM and the work of Landcare and other community action groups will be developed and implemented by Government and the SCMCC”.

Despite the failure to implement these Actions, the CMC at local level is doing well in relation to these Action areas. We have good relationships with both state and local government and with local estuary committees, and regularly use the media to promote the CMC’s support of Landcare.

Hastings Camden Haven CMC member comments, in relation to the current Ministerial review of NRM committees, include:-

- ◆ “Agency representation is important”
- ◆ “Resourcing is currently inadequate to carry out core functions; Coordinators (see below) are currently tied up with clerical duties and unable to effectively do their job”
- ◆ “There is too much duplication with committees - there is a need to consolidate NRM committees”
- ◆ “CMC’s need to stay strategic and not get bogged down in single small issues”
- ◆ **Nevertheless.....”the CMC is operating very well and represents value for money”.**

Specific comments on the various elements of this term of reference include:-

Planning: Individual CMC’s are left on their own to prepare Strategic and Business Plans. There is little or no guidance provided from state level, resulting in lack of consistency, in approach or format, to planning amongst CMC’s. Nevertheless the Hastings Camden Haven CMC has a Strategic Plan which it is currently reviewing, has recently prioritised all “threatening or degrading processes” in the catchment and is currently identifying Outcomes and Actions for each of these processes.

Resourcing: CMC’s are supported by a full time TCM Coordinator, who has tertiary qualifications in natural resource management. There is on average no more than 1.4 days per week of administrative support, which is inadequate for the amount of work that an effective CMC generates. Consequently Coordinators undertake much more routine secretarial duties than is warranted by their qualifications or salary, there is insufficient time spent on strategic action, and too much time spent on reaction to external demands/local issues.

Implementation: Implementation of catchment management is constrained at both state and catchment levels due to the Resourcing limitations outlined above. **However the program still manages to achieve significant results at catchment level, and the deserved reputation of the program amongst the community is due to the sort of achievements outlined in Enclosure 3.** Unfortunately as a result of Resourcing limitations the TCM program is not marketed well to the wider community, especially in urban areas.

Coordination: This is an important role of CMC's, and at catchment level is successful. The creation of separate Water and Vegetation committees by government, that are not part of the CMC structure, is however contrary to achieving the most effective levels of coordination, and change in this aspect of catchment management is warranted.

Cooperation: There is good cooperation amongst members of the CMC at catchment level, however we believe there are "turf wars" amongst some members of the SCMCC.

6. Mechanisms for monitoring, evaluating and reporting on catchment management programs, including the use of these reports for state of the environment reporting, and opportunities for review and improvement.

Monitoring is one of the functions of the SCMCC, and comments about the ineffectiveness of this organisation made above are also reflected in poor performance at state level in relation to this term of reference.

Actions specific to this term of reference include:-

Action 24: "Performance indicators for TCM activities will be developed by the SCMCC. CMC's and CMT's (Catchment Management Trusts) will report regularly to the SCMCC on their performance against these indicators".

Action 27: "Financial monitoring, evaluation and reporting of the activities of CMC's, CMT's and community action groups (such as Landcare) will be standardised and streamlined".

Action 34: Guidelines which set out the context (that is, policies, legislation, roles of other relevant bodies) the content and the process for developing and reviewing catchment management strategies will be developed by DLWC".

These Actions have not been implemented. Nevertheless the Hastings Camden Haven CMC carries out its own internal reviews of its activities, including regular financial reporting of committee and project funding, and review of its strategic plan. The CMC has also supported, and is participating in, a current review of the performance of some 40 externally funded Landcare Group projects. The CMC contributes to local government state of the environment reporting.

Conclusions

Despite some problems with resourcing at both state and local level, and with leadership and support at state level, the Total Catchment Management program is functioning well in the Hastings Camden Haven catchment. It has been particularly successful in linking state and local government with the general catchment community. It could be more successful, especially in the areas of strategic and catchment planning, if it better resourced and this is an area where the Commonwealth Government could assist. Commonwealth Government support of the catchment management process, as it operates in NSW, would enhance the health of urban and rural waterways.

Community members of the committee support retention of the CMC and at a recent discussion of the government's current review of the program, one members' statement summed up catchment management: "Hastings Camden Haven CMC is operating well and represents value for money".