

**COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SUBMISSION TO THE
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE
INQUIRY INTO CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT, 1999**

The Community Advisory Committee for the Murray-Darling Basin

The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) of the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council was established in 1986 to provide advice on natural resource management issues directly to the Ministerial Council. The CAC has 26 members representing the 21 Catchments of the Murray-Darling Basin; four special interest group representatives (Australian Conservation Foundation, National Farmers Federation, Australian Landcare Council, and Australian Local Government Association); and an Aboriginal representative.

Late Submission and Associated Submissions

The Chairman of the CAC, Mrs Leith Bouilly, has received an extension from the Inquiry Secretariat for this submission. A number of Catchment Committees in the Murray-Darling Basin have also made direct submissions to the Inquiry, so this submission will be brief.

However, the CAC would particularly welcome an opportunity to discuss issues face-to-face with the Inquiry; and for its members to have the opportunity to participate in any round-table meetings.

Integrated Catchment Management – Inquiry ToR 2, 3, 4 and 5

The CAC, with the Murray-Darling Basin Commission and Ministerial Council, is totally committed to the philosophy of integrated catchment management as the mechanism to address the land, water and other environmental issues of the Basin. This philosophy is currently being practised in the Basin to achieve management of our natural resources, but requires considerable commitment from Commonwealth and State Governments, jointly with the community, to implement.

Integrated Catchment Management has been defined for the Murray-Darling Basin Initiative as “a way in which we influence the human activities that use our natural resources at a scale and in a way that achieves sustainable social, environmental and economic outcomes in a given geographic area and water environment”.

Significant changes to the philosophy are currently being considered by the Murray-Darling Basin Commission. The evolution of institutional arrangements to-date has been largely based on facilitation processes, voluntary actions and projects grants. This has achieved a high level of planning and commitment but is not sufficient for the future where funding will need to be on a more stable basis.

In the Murray-Darling Basin, sustainable management of the natural resource base requires a catchment scale response. It is only at this level that community groups can integrate the issues. The scale of change currently being confronted in the Basin and Australia means that problems must be addressed from a landscape perspective. Integrated investment at a catchment scale is required to bring about the level of change required. For example, farm scale solutions will be totally inadequate to address dryland salinity.

The catchment scale approach is understood and supported by the community of the Basin, who also recognise catchments as the natural boundaries within which integrated solutions must be developed. The Commonwealth must commit to a revised approach to catchment scale investment for the future of the natural resource base.

Catchment Perspectives – addressing all Inquiry Terms of Reference

As the CAC is the peak community on natural resource management issues in the Murray-Darling Basin, the views of its constituent catchments is relevant. The following major points are extracted from their submissions:

- *the continued development of a catchment management approach to address environmental degradation is essential;*
 - *catchment management needs to be led by a peak body that is a partnership between the community and government;*
 - *the catchment management approach is successful because it involves a process of raising community awareness that ultimately leads to action;*
 - *catchment management requires a partnership between all stakeholders with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, coordinated programs and agreed priorities and cost-sharing arrangements;*
 - *best practice methods for addressing environmental degradation can be developed when scientifically rigorous technology is combined with landholder experience;*
 - *the use of public funds requires that providers of catchment programs are accountable for their actions; and*
 - *a challenge facing catchment managers is to develop catchment health indicators that are meaningful and simple to measure.*
-
- *unless catchment management concentrates on land, vegetation and water management in a balanced and independent manner then effective water management will always be difficult to achieve;*
 - *the major difficulty with implementing Catchment Management is that people see themselves primarily of a community/locality not of a catchment. Ownership of catchment management principles is (then) difficult to achieve;*
 - *despite the improvements in decision support tools and in the degree of cooperation and coordination in stakeholder activities, there continues to be considerable room for improvement with regard to effective allocation of resources, achieving optimal outcomes for investment dollars, cooperative effort, coordination of that effort and minimisation of duplication..... the Total Catchment Management philosophy and the Catchment Management approach have played a major role in the advances that have been made and will continue to be the key to further progressing improved cooperation, coordination and achieving optimal natural resource outcomes for investment dollars;*
 - *Federal, State and Local Government must show their strong commitment to catchment management by producing uniform and negotiated partnership agreements between themselves and the broader community. Unfortunately politics makes this extremely difficult to achieve;*
 - *the catchment management approach allows the community and government to look at the big picture regarding the overall long term health of the environment within a catchment system and to adopt a strategic approach to addressing natural resources issues at the catchment level;*

- *need commitment from the Commonwealth government to provide ongoing funding for natural resource management projects that is not dependent on the sale of public utilities, eg. suggest that a percentage of the GST goes to natural resource management..... Commonwealth commitment currently inadequate;*
- *need State government commitment to provide institutional structures that will provide the necessary support for effective catchment management;*
- *need local government commitment which recognises the role they have to play in effecting change at the local level and promoting adoption of Best Management Practices;*
- *the establishment of the Natural Heritage Trust and increasing requirements associated with the implementation of Trust programs has lead to considerably increased administrative demands being placed on Catchment Management Committees without additional support being provided by the Commonwealth to meet these demands.*

Community Consultation

The CAC seeks a meeting with the Inquiry to provide information from a community perspective on the issues of importance to the Inquiry.

In addition, Catchment Management organisations and CAC members could also participate in any round tables being organised in the Basin as part of the Inquiry.

Contact

The CAC Secretariat is based in Canberra. As indicated, the CAC is keen to provide additional information to the Inquiry, at a meeting where specific issues of interest to the Inquiry can be fully explored. Please contact:

Joan Vandewerdt, Executive Officer
 Community Advisory Committee, Murray-Darling Basin
 GPO Box 409
 CANBERRA ACT 2601
 Ph: 02 6279 0137
 fax: 02 6248 8424
 email: cac@mdbc.gov.au