

Facsimile/Memorandum

SNOWY GENOA CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
PO Box 26 COOMA NSW 2630

**To: The Secretary, Standing Committee on Environment
and Heritage**

Date: 31 July 1999

Re: Submission to the Inquiry into catchment management

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Total Catchment Management
Community And Government Working Together



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Please find following a submission from the Snowy Genoa Catchment management Committee to the Federal Inquiry into catchment management.

If you have any queries regarding this submission please contact Mike Gooley as noted above.

Stuart Hood
Chair.

Background

The Snowy Genoa Catchment Management Committee (CMC) was constituted in 1994 under the Catchment Management Act (NSW 1989). Since the CMC's inception it has been actively engaged in pursuing natural resource management outcomes under the spirit of the Act, for the benefit of the community.

The CMC's role is to coordinate, promote and facilitate activities consistent with total catchment management. Total catchment management (as defined in the Act) is the coordinated and sustainable use and management of land, water, vegetation and other natural resources on a water catchment basis so as to balance resource utilisation and conservation.

This Federal Inquiry into catchment management provides an ideal opportunity to assess the success and failures of the past decade and apply these to the development of catchment management in the future. To these ends, the CMC has developed this brief submission reflecting its aspirations for the future of catchment management.

For each area the Inquiry has identified, a brief comment and recommendation has been made. The CMC would welcome any dialogue regarding this paper.

Comments and Recommendations

The development of catchment management in Australia

- ◆ is based on many models

Most states have a process or institution for catchment management, all have which been developed differently. Soil conservation boards, agricultural bureaus, bush fire brigades have precipitated institutional arrangements for Integrated Catchment Management, Total Catchment Management, Catchment and Land Protection etc. Importantly, these institutions do not have specific sets of objectives, targets or guiding principles.

- ◆ has been based on the rhetoric of "ownership and responsibility based on self-help" resulting in increasing devolution of strategic intent to local communities

This has resulted in an unintended outcome of increasing frustration by many rural communities due to a mismatch between bureaucratic intent ("empowerment") with the ability for local communities to take action due to lack of resources and local capacity. Devolution/self help can be used to legitimise government low investment and non interventionist role. By devolving decision making to local community there is a centralisation of strategic control and a potential for (political) shifting of blame to the local community.

- ◆ can result in coordinating natural resource management at an aggregated (regional?) level

Planning at a catchment or sub catchment level or for a specific natural resource management issue, may not easily "roll up" into an aggregated or regional plan. There are however examples where this can occur and is dependent on a concurrence of objectives for the planning undertaken and a clear definition of the role (and responsibilities) of community and local, state and federal governments in the context of the plan.

- ◆ has not provided sufficient information to cater for strong decision making at a local level

Catchment management requires an overview of biophysical, cultural, economic and social factors to provide for appropriate environmental, social and economic outcomes for a

local community. Generally, decisions made at a local or regional assessment level rely on advocacy rather than a more objective appraisal.

- ◆ has generally had a rural focus (on natural resource management)

Many rural communities face more immediate social and economic concerns rather than environmental issues, for example, continuing decline in employment and education opportunities and loss of services in rural communities. The focus on rural catchments is also problematic - it is not until recently that catchment planning has included urban developments within plans. The converse is also true - there are rare examples of rural town planning that explicitly include the wider (biophysical) catchment issues. There needs to be appropriate “integrated planning” of urban and rural land use within a catchment context - including social and economic aspects.

- ◆ has been based on instituting an instrument to address lost economic efficiency due to incomplete specification of the privileges and restrictions of property rights

The acceptance of communities to undertake “trade-offs” (development or environmental protection, for example) at a local level is dependent on the explicit incorporation of this task by community institutions. This has not been clearly defined as a part of the community process and therefore does not “fit” as a specific task of the catchment management institutions. The ability for these trade-offs to be undertaken relies on trust (social capital) within the institutions to trade.

- ◆ has increased collaboration within communities and between communities and the state

Much of the coordination and collaboration that has occurred at a local level between community groups and local, state and federal governments has been serendipitous and due to the leadership of local individuals rather than a direct result of policy.

- ◆ has been based on volunteerism

The high reliance on volunteerism in catchment management (and Landcare) has had two unintentional outcomes: volunteerism selects for particular participants - those with a capacity to be involved and undervaluing the time and commitment of individuals leading to burn out and disillusionment.

Recommendation

That the Standing Committee address the ad hoc development of institutions and organisations for catchment management by:

- unifying federal guide lines or principles for catchment management
- providing necessary resources for community capacity development
- matching local community control of development activities with resources for implementation
- making explicit the need for catchment management processes to undertake “trade-offs” within and between catchments
- supporting and training rural regional leaders

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

A catchment approach

- ◆ provides a base unit for a systemic approach to planning and development
- ◆ provides a base unit for inter and intra basin trade-offs
- ◆ (may) include regional/urban development in a catchment approach

- ◆ may not correspond to a sociological catchment in which (between which) trade-offs may need to occur

Recommendation

That the Standing Committee adopts a catchment approach for environmental, economic and social planning that clearly identifies processes to articulate local community aspirations for acceptable environmental, economic and social development.

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

Best practice methods are not universally applicable.

Achieving environmental sustainability is not mutually exclusive of economic or social persistence. A systemic understanding of environmental and social degradation will provide the most appropriate approach to preventing, halting and reversing degradation. The applicability therefore, of best practice must be moderated in the light of environmental, economic and social context.

Recommendation

That the Standing Committee notes that best practice methods are only effective when they can be normalised at a local level through education, incentives and/or instruments that reflect the local economic and social context and the achievement of environmental sustainability cannot be isolated from the persistence of economic and social development.

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

Roles and responsibilities have not been defined. A melange of relationships have developed at local and regional levels, forming institutions that deal with varying degrees of success with catchment management issues.

Because of the need for local communities to be connected to decision making and implementation, a key issue is the reform of local government and alignment of local government areas with catchment boundaries. There needs however to be caution in regard to overt politicisation of catchment management.

With roles and responsibilities clearly defined the negotiations and mechanisms for trade-offs within and between communities will be explicit and transparent.

Recommendation

That the Steering Committee

- recognises the range of local organisations and institutions that have developed with catchment management approaches, that these may differ in local areas and provide the foundation for implementation at a local level
- accepts that local government is a key institution for a catchment approach to planning and implementation
- clearly articulates roles and responsibilities of federal, state and local governments in a catchment management approach
- recommends coincidence of catchment and local government boundaries and corresponding aggregated regional areas that reflect biophysical and social catchments

- undertakes to articulate clear definitions for property rights and public goods that will provide a basis for local communities to undertake environmental, economic and social trade-offs

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

Traditional planning methodologies have failed to meet the economic, social and environmental needs of communities.

Empowerment is dependent on how connected individuals and communities feel with decision making and control of implementing actions. Generally, communities or regions may have the strategic intent devolved to a local level but are not provided with appropriate resources to act on strategic intent.

There is a strong need to move away from the sectoral basis of supporting industry to a territorial basis of supporting regions. Pressures from globalisation and homogenisation of primary industries requires focusing on the market advantages related to regional differences rather than of sectoral efficiencies.

Recommendation

That the Steering Committee

(Planning)

- review current planning and practices
- institute a systemic planning model based on the economic, environmental and social aspirations of the local community, where target setting and monitoring provide the basis for continuous improvement

(Resourcing)

- identify the need to provide resources that reflect the capacity of local communities
- consider consolidating environmental, primary industry and business development funding programs into a single regional support funding program

(Coordination and cooperation)

- unify institutions and organisational arrangements from regional to federal level
- provide mechanisms for supporting and redefining local institutions and organisations
- provide tools for local institutions and organisations to develop and implement land use management decisions through education, incentives and policy instruments

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, evaluation and reporting for catchment management programs has generally been poor. This failure has been due to a range of factors including: lack of clear outcomes required by program managers, lack of goals of recipients of support, the “one-off” nature of addressing a single issue problem, the lack of (integrated) problem definition and the timeframe of treatment (for issues) to a funding cycle.

The application of state of the environment reporting is limited. In the context of local government realignment and application of systemic planning, “state of the catchment” or “state of the community” reporting would become an important mechanism for rural-regional community development.

For example “state of the community” reporting would include:

Population and migration	Social well being and equity	Environment and sustainability	Economic structure and performance
density change structure households communities	income housing education health safety	topography and climate land use change habitats and species soil and water air quality	labour force employment sectoral shares productivity investment

From the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 1996. Territorial indications of employment Focusing on rural development. OECD, Paris, France.

Recommendation
 That the Steering Committee

- consider the application of sustainability benchmarks for rural-regional communities (ie environmental, social and economic factors)
- apply sustainability benchmarks to “state of the community” reporting