

LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
ASSOCIATION  
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3 May 2005

Ms Louise Gell  
Secretary  
Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts  
Australian Senate  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Ms Gell

**Inquiry Into The Extent And Economic Impact Of Salinity In The Australian Environment**

Thank you for your letter dated 1 April 2005 inviting the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) to make a submission to the Australian Senate Inquiry into the extent and economic impact of salinity in the Australian environment. The LGAQ has responded to two of the three questions in accordance with your criteria of assessment as follows:

(a) whether goals of national programs to address salinity have been attained, including those stated in the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAPSWQ), National Heritage Trust (NHT) and National Landcare programs;

It is the understanding of the LGAQ that the NAPSWQ is the primary program aimed at delivering abatement programs to reduce salinity. In relation to whether goals of national programs to address salinity have been attained, in Queensland at least, there has been insufficient time to demonstrate the program's effectiveness as a result of the current phase of planning and implementation.

However, it should be noted that, from a Local Government perspective, the current focus on NRM through NAPSWQ and NHT is quite narrow. With Local Government playing a major role in programs which impact on the management of natural resources in particular salinity (e.g. waste management, sewerage, water supplies, stormwater drainage) a somewhat broader focus of current programs would be desirable.

(b) the role that regional catchment management authorities are required to play in management of salinity-affected areas, and the legislative and financial support available to assist them in achieving national goals;

The Queensland Government is currently reviewing the operation of regional natural resource management (NRM) planning arrangements including those relating to the NAPSWQ and NHT programs and options for their future design.

In October 2001, LGAQ proposed a co-ordination framework for NRM. A key feature of the proposed framework was use of the Regional Planning process established under the Integrated Planning Act 1997 (IPA) and provisions of the Act in relation to the formation and role of Regional Planning Advisory Committees (RPACs).

Following discussions with Councils and other stakeholder groups, a revised model focusing on regional and local delivery was developed in 2002. The model sought to ensure effective involvement of all stakeholder groups. It was recognised that there is a need for all sectors (community, environmental, industry, government) to work closely together to allow effective coordination and integration of actions, which will take place at the local level.



The model also recognised that strategic local action, informed by regional NRM priorities, is the key to on-the-ground outcomes for NRM across the State, and that all stakeholders have a role in implementing initiatives across a range of NRM topics (NHT, NAPSWQ, Landcare, property management, vegetation management, water rights, etc).

It was recognised that Local Government would play a key role in NRM initiatives at a local level through both its IPA regulatory role (e.g. land use controls) and through other programs and initiatives (e.g. rate incentives for conservation, acquisition of conservation land, pest management, etc) and that as a consequence of this key role, effective representation of Local Government on Regional NRM bodies was necessary.

It was also recognised in the LGAQ model that there was a need for integration of Regional NRM planning with other social, economic and environmental planning for the region. A need to link NRM Plans with overall regional planning, oversights by RPACs established under IPA was therefore seen as essential.

Further evidence of the need to review regional governance arrangements across the State is apparent from the new planning arrangements operating in South east Queensland (SEQ), with a statutory basis to the overall Regional Plan, and recognition of the need to coordinate infrastructure investment to implement the intent of the Plan. While there does not appear to be any specific proposals to extend these arrangements outside SEQ, similar issues in terms of the need for greater coordination exist in other regions, particularly those facing significant population growth e.g. Far North Queensland.

LGAQ discussions with Councils have raised a number of concerns pertaining to the functions of the regional bodies including:

- inadequate linkage to growth management/IPA planning processes;
- general lack of capacity of the regional bodies to effectively undertake the required tasks;
- lack of appreciation of local government roles and responsibilities to influence natural resource management;
- lack of understanding and skill to effectively engage Councils;
- lack of available resources to effectively support councils involvement;
- dissatisfaction with the current framework with many councils in favour of a more local government driven framework e.g. RPAC model;
- excessive strategic planning is limiting funding for on-ground projects;
- confusion over regional boundaries with some councils included in 3 different regions; and
- devolution without adequate funding mandate.

Generally, Councils that have direct involvement in the regional boards as board members express satisfaction in the process, but this is generally not the case for those Councils external to the process and reliant on communication via the board.

A recent review by the Queensland Government of NRM arrangements noted that the range of NRM related programs continue to be fragmented and uncoordinated from a whole-of-government perspective. Those interviewed in the review expressed concern that the core business of Queensland State agencies was not well aligned to provide a high level of integrated support and advice to Regional Bodies. In particular, there was consistent recognition of the need for clearer alignment of regional NRM planning with regional growth management frameworks available under IPA.



Furthermore, the Association believes that there are already extensive legislative powers available in Queensland to achieve sustainable environmental and natural resource management outcomes. Therefore, the Association would be opposed to moves from any other sphere of government that would usurp or diminish Council planning powers, or see non elected groups override Local Government's legitimate autonomy or decision-making role.

For further information please contact the Association's **NRM Project Coordinator Malcolm Petrie** on ph (07) 3000 2202 or email [malcolm\\_petrie@lgaq.asn.au](mailto:malcolm_petrie@lgaq.asn.au)

Yours sincerely

Greg Hoffman PSM  
DIRECTOR  
POLICY & REPRESENTATION

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