

The Committee Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

To the Committee

I am a retired mining geologist now very involved in the NRM movement. I am the Treasurer of the Mitchell River Watershed Management Group in Far North Queensland and live in Atherton.

I became involved with the Mitchell Group, the Northern Gulf Resource Management Group, the Cape York Development Association, and the Terrain NRM (wet tropics) Group in order to represent the mining industry which I found had rarely received attention in nrm deliberations, and yet is one of the major causes of habitat degradation in northern Australia. In particular old mine sites.

My decision to get involved was because of the atmosphere I found in these groups. It is the first time I have been able to work with people who represent diverse and sometimes opposing interests who are willing to sit down around the table, leave the baggage at the door, and work in the interests of country: graziers with traditional owners; miners with conservationists; farmers with scientists, and so. It has been an exhilarating experience.

Unfortunately that whole movement is threatened. Uncertainty as to funding and policy renders positions insecure. People with tremendous skills in nrm issues, who have built strong rapport with their communities, are uncertain where the movement is going. Just at a time when the whole investment in nrm is beginning to show real dividends the whole thing is in danger of falling off the rails. Staff are leaving and members of the many executives and community members who give their time for free are very disillusioned.

In the latter half of 2007 a tremendous effort was put into preparing submissions for what was to be the NHT3 term of five years. The previous programs were beginning to pay dividends. That has gone out of the window. The Open Grants only offer short term projects that must be finished by June 2009. NRM projects do not work that way. Long term studies and campaigns are required. Weeds and ferals, chemical degradation, fish population decline, etc, do not take much notice of political developments in Canberra.

Various things are needed:-

1. Groups need core funding to guarantee their viability. If admin costs are linked to individual projects there is no guarantee that sufficient projects will get up to cover the full cost of maintaining a group through the year. Unfortunately administration does not produce measurable 'outcomes'. And yet without the engagement of the nrm staff with their communities projects will not get off the ground. The goodwill of the many stakeholders depends on the rapport between them and the nrm managers and staff. Staff need to know that they can focus on the various projects that the community wants and not worry about where the next meal is coming from.

2. Given the overall ignorance to date of the environment in the tropics, most projects need to start with the accumulation of information. Much of this has now been started and in some cases a database is available, but in other cases there is a long way to go.

3. Projects need to be long term. The environment moves slowly. If 'outcomes' are to be the criterion, years are needed in order for them to be demonstrated. I recommend not less than 5 years for most.

4. Mining needs to figure much more prominently. The rehabilitation of acid producing mine sites is a major issue as aquatic habitats are directly threatened, but there are many other issues concerning abandoned mine sites for which nobody now has responsibility. New mines operate under strict new legislation, but old sites get little attention.

I would be happy to discuss these issues at length if needed.

Yours faithfully

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