



14 August 2008

The Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport  
P O Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

### **SUBMISSION INTO NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN AUSTRALIA**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the future direction of natural resource management in Australia, including program importance and funding opportunities. Council would like to commend the Federal Government on the development of the Caring for Country initiative, and looks forward to positive gains for environmental management generated by this program into the future.

Council strongly supports the work of the Landcare networks over the past thirty years, and believes that the program has raised the level of community awareness and understanding around the need for improved natural resource management as an integral part of best practice production of food and fibre. The Landcare networks have allowed land managers and natural resource management agency staff to form productive partnerships whose work can be seen across rural landscapes, as eroded gullies and weed infested waterways have been fenced off and revegetated, and wildlife corridor linkages have been established through the planting of thousands of windbreaks. Seed banks for the collection and propagation of native plants for revegetation projects have been established, machinery has been purchased for groups to share, and a spirit of joint participation and caring has been engendered in rural Australia. The Award system has allowed the showcasing of excellence and the recognition of outstanding effort on rural properties has been a real highlight of the Landcare program. However council believes that there has always been, and continues to be, a need for coordination, direction and technical input and advice from agency staff, as this is considered vital to continue the impetus of the Landcare system.

With regard to NHT funding, the continued development of the work of Catchment Management Authorities and emphasis on a whole-of-catchment approach to natural resource management has been vital to maintaining gains in land management areas such as nutrient management, soil stability, improving native vegetation cover and ongoing weed control efforts. Insufficient funding for weed control across the landscape, particularly within linear reserves, is of major concern and must be addressed in any new programs.

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Council believes that the Good Neighbour program funding for invasive plants and animals work on the Crown land/freehold interface is an important area which requires substantial financial support to make gains into the future where efforts have not always been effective in the past. The work of Greening Australia, with emphasis on revegetation and re-establishment of native vegetation corridor linkages very much requires ongoing support, particularly in the face of expected changes to plant and animal ranges due to climate change. The work of Trust for Nature, with an emphasis on encouragement of conservation covenants and revolving fund land purchases for conservation is also applauded. As well, the work of the Department of Sustainability and Environment in its research into improved management of rare and threatened species and of the Department of Primary Industries in its efforts to improve on-farm land and animal husbandry are to be commended.

Council is concerned that there is a major issue with the short term nature of funding for natural resource management programs. This approach has generated short term contract employment as the only option for many natural resource management professionals. This appears to increase instability within staffing structures and causes a loss of background knowledge and familiarity with local people and issues, as staff are forced to move on at the end of each contract. It is believed that there is scope here for improvement.

Council feels that we can best build on the wealth of knowledge and experience around natural resource management which already exists within our community by reinstating long-term tenure for agency staff and engendering a spirit of co-operation back into caring for the land and its biodiversity. It seems that in order to be more effective, land managers must work across land tenures, and must get rid of the current "silo" mentality and ensure all agencies work together in partnerships to improve natural resource management outcomes on a landscape scale. This ethic can best be facilitated by regular inclusive forums prepared and attended by land managers and agency staff across the spectrum. It appears that the best way we can work towards mitigation of the projected impacts of climate change is by improving vegetation connectivity from the inland landscapes to the coast and by applying improved land management and engineering options to bolster the robustness of coastal areas to cope with rising sea levels and inundation, as well as the expected impacts of frequent, severe weather events.

With regard to the overall costs and benefits of the regional approach to catchment and coastal planning, Council would endorse the importance of planning for whole-of-catchment natural resource management. In the face of changing climatic conditions there is a need to identify possible impacts early in the planning horizon and manage or mitigate them at a landscape level. In this regard, catchment planning must broaden to encompass biodiversity and its threats to the alpine environment, foothills, plains, particularly floodplains, estuaries and must also include benthic vegetation and marine fauna. Many management plans have been created in recent years, but funding has not been available for their implementation. In view of the need to mitigate the impacts of Climate Change, now is the time that adequate funding must be provided to review and implement their many recommended actions. Maintaining a regional approach to natural resource management is considered vitally important, particularly when reviewing the implications of the many variations encountered between catchments in soils, water availability, climatic influences, topography, vegetation and invasive threats.

Council believes that a long-term strategic approach for natural resource management at a federal level is important; however there is some concern around the selection of iconic sites for extra funding at the expense of regions with major funding requirements to assist in the growing of the nation's food. Regions able to continue growing food and fibre into the future, in the face of uncertain climatic variation, must be supported to remain robust and viable, particularly in view of the current international food crisis. There is an opportunity to

support best practice land management nation-wide through the increased support for demonstration farms, to showcase and promote the adoption of beneficial land practices such as the establishment of new and improved drought and salinity tolerant pastures and climate adaptive animal management. A federal level strategic direction needs to set the general natural resource management approach, however as Australia has such a huge variation in topography and climate, local strategic directions must flow from this to suite each region's individual needs.

The capacity of regional natural resource management groups and networks to engage land managers to deliver beneficial on-ground outcomes appears to have been greatly reduced as a result of recent funding changes. If all levels of government are to promote resilience in primary production and the maintenance of biodiversity in the face of climate change there is an urgent need for an increase in funding for extension work and particularly to support agency staff such as Landcare Co-ordinators, Greening Australia field officers, Trust for Nature field staff, and generally, all staff who act as a bridge between various levels of government and those responsible for the on-ground delivery of land management programs.

If you have any questions regarding the matters raised in this submission, please contact Council's Environmental Planner, Heather Cahill on (03) 51423363.

Yours faithfully

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Our Ref: Natural Resource Management - Submission  
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