

14 August 2008

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

Dear Secretary

Inquiry into Natural Resource Management and Conservation Challenges

South Coast Natural Resource Management Inc. welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Senate Inquiry into Natural Resource Management (NRM) and Conservation Challenges.

We provide information on the following matters for consideration:

- *The lessons learned from the successes and failures of three decades of Commonwealth investment in resource management including Landcare, the Natural Heritage Trust, The National Action Plan on Salinity and Water Quality, and other national programs;*
 - The lack of continuity of funding is a failure as it puts community offside as on ground works a jeopardised, momentum is lost and staff leave.
 - A frustration is that community have a long term vision for NRM that is being funded through short term funding cycles.
 - A success stemming from NHT2 and NAP is the asset-based planning and management approach that provides the opportunity for all stakeholders to deliver tangible outcomes against established targets.
 - A failure is that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is still not well undertaken due to the lack of cooperation and coordination between State and Australian Governments. The Australian Government needs to set the overall strategic direction for M&E.
 - A frustration is that regions are left to develop M&E plans with little or no direction. The result is the ongoing difficulty in identifying if outcomes are being achieved, and lack of consistency between regions that makes aggregating results difficult at a state and national level.

Connecting the South Coast



- Strategic planning by the regions through accredited Regional NRM Strategies has been a success as it sets the direction and provides priorities for funding NRM work in the region.
 - A success is community engagement (including Indigenous people) in our Region in the last four years due to the regional delivery model.
 - A failure is that funding of NRM is not seen as core business of government, only being seen as the right thing to do and not a necessity.
- *How we can best build on the knowledge and experience gained from these programs to capitalise on existing networks and projects and maintain commitment and momentum among land-holders;*
 - By maintaining the capacity within NRM Regions to deliver strategic outcomes.
 - By maintaining funding to ensure continuity of programs and projects.
 - Through providing continuity of funding to ensure no gaps in investments in programs and projects.
 - Continue to fund data management systems, monitoring and evaluation processes, information management networks, people networks and expertise across regions, States and Australia
 - *The overall costs and benefits of a regional approach to planning and management of Australia's catchments, coasts and other natural resources;*
 - The environmental, social and environmental benefits far outweigh the costs.
 - The amount of funding and "in kind" resources that is leveraged into programs and projects exceeds four times the amount of funding provided.
 - It should be recognised that there are some unavoidable costs that need to be acknowledged by the funders if we are to protect and enhance the environment. Some of these costs are long-term and beyond standard terms of government office in some cases.
 - A benefit is the integration, cooperation and strategic partnerships between government, community and industry that have been developed to deliver outcomes.
 - The regional approach provides strategic integrated planning and delivery across government, community and industry sectors in a way that is impossible for government alone to achieve.
 - The regional scale approach delivers resources from National and State levels effectively and efficiently to regional and local levels.
 - The regional approach provides meaningful community involvement in long term planning.
 - The regional approach possesses traits of cooperation, collaboration and genuine community engagement that are specific to community-based Regional NRM.
 - Regional NRM Groups are facilitating the delivery of government policy and priorities through strategic funding that is engaging the wider community, including indigenous people, and industry in NRM decision-making, problem solving and implementation.

- The regional approach is a cost effective method of implementing NRM because it avoids duplication through improved integration, assigning clear roles and responsibilities and leveraging additional external funds and resources.
 - The Regional NRM Groups assist the Australian, State and Local Government to achieve their objectives, through facilitation and integration, particularly in areas where gaps currently exist.
 - This approach allows investment in NRM to proceed with certainty to reach targets jointly agreed to by the Australian and State Governments and the community.
 - The regional approach provides a catalyst and mechanism for behaviour change at a level that is currently difficult for government to access.
 - The regional approach is an integrated approach. Collectively we can achieve much more than by operating individually and by being bound to traditional agency, industry or interest group 'silos.'
 - The regional approach brings together all the stakeholders in NRM that are the community and builds on agency capacity. The agencies are key partners at every stage of the process and integral to its success. The agencies are involved in planning, decision-making and implementation and provide technical advice. Regions facilitate and coordinate resources for partners including agency with the technical capacity to carry out initiatives.
 - Capacity to act quickly through a framework of adaptive management, and less hidebound by traditional agency hierarchies and operating systems.
- *The need for a long-term strategic approach to NRM at the national level;*
- Vital. The Australian Government Joint NRM Team approach has been pivotal to achieving outcomes at a strategic level.
 - Uncertainty in current government NRM funding only adds to the insecurity and instability in NRM. Maintaining the momentum towards community acceptance of strategic, prioritised NRM investment built up incrementally over the last three decades is at risk without a long term approach.
 - Need a long term strategic plan at a national level to map out the way forward to protect and enhance our unique environment. This plan should have a timeframe and operating ability outside government election cycles.
 - Regional NRM plans need to be included in any National natural resource management plan, not sitting to the side.

- *The capacity of regional NRM groups, catchment management organisations and other national conservation networks to engage land managers, resource users and the wider community to deliver on-the-ground NRM outcomes as a result of the recent changes to funding arrangements under the Caring for our Country program; and*
 - At present there is a huge amount of uncertainty due to changes brought on at short notice and at the end of the NHT 2 funding cycle. Due to sound financial management and due diligence, the South Coast NRM Region is well placed for this year to deliver on national priorities but we are still unsure of what is being asked of us in future. We are working very closely with all stakeholders, but it is increasingly difficult to keep all our partners engaged and sharing an optimistic vision for the future.
 - Previously secure partnerships could now be under threat due to the uncertainty of the different funding programs. Some groups will now 'go it alone'. This could again lead to a poorly integrated 'siloed' approach where the multiple benefits of strategic direction and well integrated planning and delivery will be replaced once again with duplication and wastage.
 - We are willing to help the Government develop and maintain a strategic approach to deliver on its national priorities. We just need to be given certainty of funding and in our role in delivery.
- *The extent to which the Caring for our Country program represents a comprehensive approach to meeting Australia's future NRM needs.*
 - It could be really good but this depends on how the program is developed.
 - The six national priorities are well covered by the South Coast NRM Inc. strategic approach and delivery mechanisms.
 - There is a lack of clarity of how (or if?) marine NRM is covered within the six national priorities. Acknowledgement of the catchment/coast/marine continuum is a central plank of strategic planning and integrated NRM delivery within the South Coast NRM Region, and we are keen to continue investment in the important and popular marine NRM area.
 - The regional NRM strategies play a pivotal role in articulating the strategic direction that has been developed by regional communities.

South Coast NRM Inc. would be able to attend any public hearings the Committee may have to speak to our submission.

Yours faithfully

Garry English
Chairman