

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

I have been an active community member in the Environment world for the past twenty years. I don't have any honors, as I'm a hands on type of person. I represent several environmental and disability groups on an honorary basis and believe we must all do a little to protect our precious environment. I am currently the spokesperson for the Botany Bay and Catchment Alliance Inc., President of the South West Enviro Centre Inc. and National President of the Disabled Surfers Association of Australia Inc. Experience you cannot learn from a text book or report.

1. LESSONS LEARNT: It is evident that most governments be them federal or state, over the past few decades want to be seen to be showing concern and have produced plans, strategies and programs that have obviously spent most of the funding on glossy brochures, committees and strategies that eventually end up in landfill. Some tokenistic programs have outcomes, yet most fall by the wayside, yet get dragged out when needed to support some political whim.

The establishment of CMA's is another one of those issues of being seen to be concerned. The failure to have community representatives on the boards of most CMA's and the misnomer of a CMA when most don't know their catchment, fail to manage the catchment's major impacting issues such as poor planning, lack of power in most, if not all environmental legislations and fail to have any authority, especially when the catchment is under threat from some planning process. CMA's are reluctant to have a say or submit to any local, state or federal issue, be it private or corporate. They don't want to upset the apple cart with developers, even if the proposal will have a detrimental impact on a local area or the entire catchment. Salinity and water quality issues are best summed up by looking at previous planning approvals and in most cases you will find that very little modeling on environmental impacts turn out correct, especially over some period of time.

I am totally of the belief and convinced that regional CMC's (Catchment Management Committees) with appropriate legislative powers and funding, would do a much better job in catchment management issues

2. BUILD ON KNOWLEDGE: It is a common belief that within the political processes of chucking dollars at issues through land holders (especially in the cities), government departments and consultants along with tokenistic community meetings, that all can be fixed. In most cases the true knowledge is the local community or groups within. For example, the community groups of the Botany Bay catchment were called together to assist in the drafting of the federally funded "The Tide Is Turning" strategy. Most had never met one

another, yet worked together to brainstorm and raise the awareness of the impacts of the entire catchment. The document is now gathering dust, as most do, yet the groups have continued with the establishment of an umbrella group which now represents over thirty NGO's and currently has a boycott on dealing with the CMA. Just because one represents an NGO, doesn't mean that their knowledge is any lesser than that of the so called authorities. The NGO will be around far long than any government representative and way beyond any political agenda.

3. COST AND BENEFITS OF REGIONAL APPROACH: Regional or more direct support in some case may be of some benefit. In other cases a holistic approach may be needed, yet understanding that regions may cross many catchments, so political boundaries will never allow the greater understanding of the needs of an entire catchment or the sustainable planning of such catchments. There are very few benefits to the sustainability of our environment whilst state and federal legislations fail to do what they were intended to do. The systematic erosion of both state and federal legislative powers, added to the lack of bureaucratic intestinal fortitude to challenge the credibility of most proposals that impact, has generated the very reason why this particular inquiry is needed, yet I don't wish to hold my breath for any outcome in the near future, as by the time any answers are put forward and acted upon, there may be no environment left to protect.

4. LONG TERM STRATEGIC APPROACH: A MUST, NOT a DREAM ! .

5. REGIONAL NRM, CMA, CMC, NETWORKS, WHATEVER to engage issues for OUTCOMES: Very few outcomes are derived by bureaucratic intervention with policies, plans, strategies or brain storming.

Most do it as a job, a means of climbing the ladder. Community support of any environmental initiative is generally forthcoming. As the processes unfolds and egos evolve, most of what good will was in place, erodes quickly as most community consultations are nothing more than tokenistic. It generally covers the requirements of any terms of reference and generally tells the community what will occur, instead of asking them what should occur. Never underestimate the knowledge of the local community and be sure to read page 7 of the NSW Government's "Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System". Another waste of funding, that failed to understand what was written within and never made it past the draft process. Taskforce after taskforce without any outcome.

My catchment is Botany Bay and I have been directly and indirectly involved with over \$30,000,000 worth of both federal and state strategies and plans for the bay alone, over the past ten years. Not one has ever come to fruition. No wonder the community sees the engagement process to be tokenistic, responding to dominant voices and ignoring the broader community, as a means of co-opting groups or defusing opposition, as falsely raising public expectations, or as substitutes for good government and sound policy making. The processes have given rise to the belief by NGO'S that most community engagements are cynical and manipulative exercises. Part of the approach is clarifying the limits of the community's influence in the process. This is

particularly necessary when the decision making power ultimately rests with the government. Without a clear definition of the realities of a particular situation, it is inevitable that a sense of distrust will be generated about the engagement process.

6. I've been caring for my country for decades. I haven't had time to sit down and read another document that promises so much, yet will it deliver in the time needed ? I spend my time responding to unsustainable development proposals that impact on my catchment. Most are supported by local government, state government and have very little input from the federal government, even if issues are raised dealing with the E.P.B.C. Act and any bi-lateral agreement which defuses any argument against the development. If we are to believe in a future for the health of our environment, eco-systems and biodiversity, whether it be the Murray-Darling Catchment or the Cooks River catchment. We must believe that whoever is responsible for the long term management, have the legislative powers needed, are willing to use them against economic challenges, use the community, not abuse the community and have sustainable outcomes.

Gary Blaschke OAM