

25 August 2008

Contact:  
Phone:  
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Our Ref:  
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The Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional  
Affairs and Transport  
PO Box 6100  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

**Re: Inquiry into natural resource management**

Thank you for inviting the Murray Catchment Management Authority (CMA) to provide a written submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport.

The following comments are provided:

(i) (ii): National programs such as the Natural Heritage Trust have been enormously successful in harnessing community effort and leveraging matching funding from jurisdictions for natural resource management (NRM). Their success in building a foundation for further community-government collaboration now appears to be undervalued.

Experience shows that funding cycles must recognise the inherent time lags between the conception, planning and implementation of NRM projects, and for improvements in resource condition to be confidently demonstrated.

Five years of drought has effectively removed salinity from the NRM agenda. This is a short-term view that threatens to devalue past investments.

(iii): The regional approach offers a number of advantages over other NRM delivery models. For example, there is greater potential to link with local government, to achieve better investment value through one-on-one negotiations between professional staff and individual resource managers, and to better attribute desired outcomes to interventions. To become truly effective, however, these efforts need to be sustained over time to engender trust, develop knowledge and enable learning from experience.

Catchment Management Authorities are new institutions. They are not perfect but they are improving. It is accepted that there has been some alienation of Landcare groups and that involvement of the urban community has also diminished. These and other deficiencies can be best addressed by expanding the functions of CMAs and resourcing CMAs appropriately rather than reducing the scope of CMAs.

(iv): State and Federal Governments must make long-term funding commitments to sustain NRM institutions to facilitate long-term and strategic approaches to NRM.

(v): Funding arrangements under the new Caring for our Country have undoubtedly reduced the capacity of NRM institutions to engage resources managers. Priorities have been poorly defined, application processes have resulted in excessive failure rates, baseline funding to CMAs has been substantially reduced, and the potential to leverage matching state funding has been neglected. Changing national priorities and the new

MERI framework are also likely to result in the need for regional NRM plans to be reviewed, with the potential for further separation between State and Australian Government financial planning and reporting requirements.

(vi): The success of the Caring for our Country program will ultimately be gauged by how comprehensive the program has been in nurturing adaptive NRM institutions. For example, the Caring for our Country program must:

- be adequately supported by clear principles and goals;
- sustain efforts by NRM institutions and resource managers over long timeframes;
- establish pathways for new information to be sought and shared;
- provide the capability at regional or catchment scales for priority assets to be identified, threats to be effectively combated and success to be measured; and
- change the attitudes and behaviours of resource managers through inclusive approaches.

I trust that the Senate Standing Committee will consider these matters in its deliberations.

Yours Sincerely



Tim Sheed  
**Acting Chairperson**