

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

Dear Sir/Madam

### **Inquiry into Natural Resource Management and Conservation Challenges**

Thank you for your correspondence of 6 August 2008 inviting submissions to the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport inquiry into natural resource management and conservation challenges.

The Tasmanian Department of Environment, Parks, Heritage and the Arts is responsible for the sustainable management and protection of the State's natural and cultural assets, including Tasmania's parks and reserves system containing two of Australia's World Heritage Areas and its pristine environment. The Department is pleased to provide the following response to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference, focusing on the areas of nature conservation, coastal estuarine and marine management, and water quality management.

#### **1. The lessons learned from the successes and failures of three decades of Commonwealth investment in resource management including Landcare, the National Heritage Trust, The National Action Plan on Salinity and Water Quality, and other national programs:**

##### Nature conservation

Access to Australian Government funding programs for management of sensitive reserve environments such as the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, Macquarie Island World Heritage Area, Southport Lagoon Conservation Area and the Arthur Pieman Conservation Area has, and continues to be, very important to Tasmania.

Funding under Natural Resource Management (NHT/NRM) programs and the *Caring for our Country* program has enabled the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) to be managed to a high standard, maintaining an extensive and resilient natural area that contains outstanding landscapes and many habitats of threatened species and ecological communities. Stability of programs with funding agreements of three to five years are fundamental to sound management.

The joint funding arrangements for the TWWHA between the Commonwealth and Tasmanian Governments, supported by an effective Consultative Committee, is a model of excellent Commonwealth-State cooperation in natural resource management that has resulted in demonstrable outcomes for conservation and presentation to visitors. This investment by the Commonwealth has been effective for several reasons: it has been based on an initial agreement; there have been good administrative and governance structures and procedures put in place;

funding has been relatively consistent (although dropping in recent years) enabling programs to be developed, refined and maintained; and funding priorities have been identified through comprehensive management plans developed with high levels of public engagement, and subject to review, updates and evaluation.

During the late 1980s Tasmania received Commonwealth funding for the development of a pilot program on minimal impact bushwalking. Information and materials developed by this program were subsequently used and adopted Australia wide - to avoid or minimise environmental impacts arising from one of the most popular forms of recreation in natural areas. This is an example of strategic use of Commonwealth funding - whereby an agency in one state can develop materials with application more broadly. It is an approach that could be more widely used.

At Tasmania's other World Heritage Area property, Macquarie Island Nature Reserve, provision of a significant level of Commonwealth funding over several years has enabled the Tasmanian Government to mount a response to the environmental emergency caused by increasing populations of rabbits and rodents, likely exacerbated by climate change. Macquarie Island contains habitat critical to the survival of the wandering albatross, *Diomedea exulans exulans* and the grey-headed albatross, *Thalassarche chrysostoma*; both species are listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC). There are 5 species of petrel and prions that are also listed under the EPBC Act, as well as a larger number of species listed under Tasmanian legislation. It is only early days for the current pest eradication program on Macquarie Island but there is little doubt that, without the assistance of the Australian Government through its funding programs, the chances of protecting native species in the face of increasing environmental damage would be difficult due to the State's lack of resources. In this instance, the State had an approved management plan that provided a basis for management action, however, suddenly escalating environmental damage necessitated an immediate and comprehensive response. This is an example of the important role of the Commonwealth in providing short-term funding for environmental management in emergency situations, where there is an established management framework and planning context.

At the beginning of this century, the State developed Tasmania's Nature-Based Tourism Program with funding received from NHT, the Tasmanian Regional Forest Agreement and State sources. This program ran for three years from 2000-2002 and involved much needed improvements to visitor infrastructure in parks and reserves around the state. These included planning development and promotion of the 60 Great Short Walks; Tamar Island, Hastings, Mt Field and East Coast Visitor Centres; upgraded walking tracks on Tasman Peninsula, new day and camping facilities at Freycinet National Park and a network of visitor projects in the Great Western Tiers region. In total, over \$12m was spent on these projects, resulting in vastly improved access and facilities for a range of visitors to experience, enjoy and appreciate many of the outstanding values of Tasmania's natural areas. As well as providing enrichment for visitors, these projects enabled environmental impacts to be addressed. The many benefits of these projects continue to flow today and are expected to continue well into the future.

Another good example of successful Commonwealth investment is at Southport Lagoon, where there had been a long running issue with uncontrolled 4WD vehicle use of the reserve and adjacent land. The reserve contains three plant species that are critically endangered nationally. Through a well documented management planning process in 2005 the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service identified options for management and demonstrated a preferred option of closure of the area subject to damaging use and provision of new environmentally sustainable access and camping facilities. Australian Government assistance with funding for management works ensured that the only known population of the critically endangered swamp eyebright *Euphrasia gibbsiae* ssp. *psilantherea* could be effectively protected. This is an example of good coordination and strategic use of Commonwealth programs to achieve conservation outcomes in a timely manner which can then be maintained by the State. Commonwealth investment has been effectively and efficiently targeted due to significant prior investment and effort by the State in planning and community consultation.

Recent Commonwealth NRM funding for coastal values studies and protection works associated with increasing recreational vehicle use in the Arthur Pieman Conservation Area has established a sound basis for improved protection and management of this coastal reserve, which contains

highly significant natural and cultural values. Amongst its many values, the reserve is important as part of the Bass Strait migratory corridor for many bird species, including the threatened orange-bellied parrot. It is rich in orchid species, including six that are listed under the EPBC Act. This important survey work could not have been achieved without Commonwealth assistance.

### Coastal Management

Briefly discussing programs focussed on the management of coastal, estuarine and marine resources, commencing in the early 1990s, Ocean Rescue 2000 was launched in 1992, and soon after the Marine and Coastal Community Network (MCCN) was established to support broad community capacity building around priority coastal and marine management issues. All jurisdictions including Tasmania had a regional coordinator, and nationally high quality information products were produced that often mirrored international, national or regional policy issues. At the time of its loss of funding in June 2008, the MCCN had approximately 12,000 participants. This was a highly successful initiative, constantly evolving its focus and highly regarded as a reliable source of balanced information independent of government. Its demise has left a very large gap in information access, and the loss of regional coordinators adds to the general winding back of capacity to engage and support community.

The Tasmanian Government participated in the Resource Assessment Commission (RAC) Coastal Zone Inquiry, reporting in 1993, leading to the development of the 1995 Commonwealth Coastal Policy and the associated implementation package called the National Coastal Action Plan (NCAP). NCAP brought resources and programs to fruition that implemented the major recommendations of the RAC inquiry and the principles and objectives for coastal zone management contained in the Commonwealth Coastal Policy 1995. The key programs included Coastcare, the Coastal and Marine Planning Program, the Capacity Building Program, Fishcare and a Marine Protected Areas program.

All States and the Northern Territory, together with Local Government Associations, negotiated and signed a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding to implement NCAP, and this included agreed shared funding formulae, particularly for Coastcare. NCAP was therefore a cooperative, jointly funded initiative that reflected national, state and local government coastal and marine priorities with an agreed policy underpinning, unique amongst NHT programs.

In 1996, the MoUs were retained by the incoming Federal Government but rebadged Coasts and Clean Seas. Although the Commonwealth Coastal Policy was dropped, the Principles and Objectives for coastal zone management it contained were retained in the MoUs. Commonwealth funding was brought under the new Natural Heritage Trust (NHT1). A new Clean Seas program was introduced to address coastal water quality issues, and some smaller marine focussed programs.

The MoUs were abandoned by the Commonwealth in 2002 following the introduction of the new Regional NRM delivery approach. With this came the loss of the very successful Coastcare Program which had been allowed to evolve over the previous seven years into an effective, efficient, well targeted, strategic program, supporting community volunteer engagement, partnership development, capacity building and long-term community change in attitude and behaviour. It should be noted that the Coastcare Program was not included in the evaluation of NHT1 which saw programs lost following the introduction of Regional NRM and Envirofund.

#### Key lessons learned:

- The value of a tripartite approach and formal agreement;
- The importance of an agreed policy background to NRM funding programs;
- Appreciating the importance of building long-term relationships with the community;
- Letting a successful model evolve over time based on lessons learned from successes and failures;
- The importance of a well managed, stable, long-term facilitator team able to share resources and experience with jurisdictions;
- 'One size does not fit all', and one-stop-shop programs (e.g. Envirofund) often become complex and unwieldy trying to meet the full range of priorities – e.g. The

need to have a special 'coastal' round in 2007 to facilitate better coastal volunteer participation.

### Water Quality Management

By way of background, the Environment Division within the Tasmanian Department of Environment, Parks, Heritage and the Arts is currently undertaking a review of the State Policy on Water Quality Management 1997 (SPWQM). The SPWQM is a Tasmanian State Policy made under the *State Policies and Projects Act 1993* (SPPA). Introduced in 1997, the Policy provides a strategic and technical framework for the protection of ambient water quality in Tasmania's inland and marine waters, including groundwater. It implements the National Water Quality Management Strategy (NWQMS): a joint initiative of all Australian governments aimed at achieving a nationally consistent approach to water quality management. It is the principal instrument for managing water quality in Tasmania's Resource Management and Planning System.

In relation to Water Quality, NRM regional strategies are required to contain standards and targets according to the National Framework for Natural Resource Management Standards and Targets. For water quality, the Commonwealth developed the Water Quality Targets Handbook and Water Quality Targets Online, '...to assist regional groups to set environmental values and water quality targets for their catchment/region.' These publications advocate using the Australian and New Zealand Guidelines for Fresh and Marine Water Quality 2000 ("ANZECC Guidelines 2000" - an NWQMS document) to devise regional NRM water quality targets.

The advent of NRM in Tasmania has been a two edged sword for the SPWQM. On the one hand, NRM could be seen as a collateral framework that diverts attention and resources from the implementation of the SPWQM, particularly the development of water quality guidelines and water quality objectives pursuant to the State Policy. Introducing multiple frameworks with duplicate functions exacerbated an already complex tangle of programs and governance arrangements.

Consultation revealed that some officers/stakeholders involved in NRM processes erroneously believed 'water quality targets' in NRM regional strategies were in fact WQOs developed under the SPWQM. Others thought the NRM strategies had superseded the SPWQM as the primary instruments for managing the State's water quality. In many cases, there was confusion about the status and relationship of the two frameworks. These types of duplication problems are precisely what both the National Water Quality Management Strategy and NRM sought to overcome.

On the other hand, there has been cross-fertilisation between the frameworks with potential for more in the future. The establishment of PEVs for all Tasmania's inland and estuarine waters was completed due (in part) to some funding from the National Heritage Trust and National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, as was the development of the Tasmanian Surface Water Quality Monitoring Strategy. As the regional water quality targets developed for the NRM regional strategies are based on the ANZECC 2000, they could easily be translated into SPWQM water quality guidelines and water quality objectives. WQ guidelines and objectives could in turn be used for future regional NRM strategic planning.

In summary, implementation of the State Policy on Water Quality Management 1997 has benefited from Commonwealth funded NRM programs; but the benefits must be balanced against the problems of duplication and confusion associated with the introduction of multiple water quality management frameworks. The duplication could be addressed by implementing measures to ensure future Commonwealth funded programs related to Tasmanian ambient water quality (fresh and marine) recognise the State Policy on Water Quality Management 1997 framework as the definitive framework for water quality management in the State.

#### **2. 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:**

In general, communities and local businesses, members of community and professional organisations, schools, research institutions etc are enduring and reliable accumulators of knowledge and experience. However, Natural Resource Management is as complex as any area

of human endeavour, with new approaches introduced and existing programs dropped and replaced, yet stakeholders are often expected to immediately engage in the new arrangements.

NRM would benefit greatly from an underlying stability which enables the complex matrix of stakeholders to remain engaged in the face of changing priorities and policies, and emerging challenges.

### **3. The overall costs and benefits of a regional approach to planning and management of Australia's catchments, coasts and other natural resources:**

The regional approach has provided a good platform for effective integration across catchments, estuaries, coasts and the marine environment, supported by the National Cooperative Integrated Coastal Zone Management Framework adopted by the NRM Ministerial Council. This integration was difficult under the formulation of programs within NHT1. However, integration is only partly achieved, and is a good example of an objective that can only be reached by continued long-term effort, and sharing experience within and between regions.

Many regional 'investments' are won and managed by consultancies. A stream of reports and data have been produced, but little by way of the ongoing capacity building within local councils and community organisations that might result from these stakeholders managing projects.

Regional strategies are generally well researched plans with extensive consultation, and are an important initiative in tackling significant environmental challenges.

(Refer also to the response to Term of Reference 1 regarding the interaction of the regional framework/s and the State Policy on Water Quality Management 1997 framework).

### **4. The need for a long-term strategic approach to natural resource management (NRM) at the national level:**

#### Nature conservation

With around 38 per cent of Tasmania in reserves managed by the Parks and Wildlife Service, the involvement and assistance of the Australian Government is vital in providing strategic funding to strengthen reserve management to avoid, minimise and, where possible, reverse the decline in flora and fauna species.

With the introduction of the NRM funding programs, funding for conservation management programs in reserves became more difficult. The priorities for funding programs turned more to off-reserve conservation where some of the long term outcomes could not be readily assured and where the emphasis was more on good management of agricultural land rather than biodiversity conservation. It is considered that Commonwealth conservation programs should encompass reserved land where natural systems in relatively good condition can be maintained and enhanced and where conservation outcomes from investments are more assured in the long-term.

There has been a tendency for government to assume that once reserved an area no longer requires management input. Increasingly we are seeing incursions by weed species in coastal reserves as well as plant and animal diseases and introduced species spreading in native populations. These are priorities that require a long-term commitment, based on good scientifically based management strategies and plans involving public and private land managers and the community.

It is recommended that Commonwealth natural resource management and conservation funding programs re-assert emphasis on conservation management programs to support the completion of the establishment of the national reserve system, and the maintenance and enhancement of the condition of this system.

State-wide nature conservation priorities such as the Save the Devil and fox eradication programs are of high national strategic importance and should be maintained/expanded as necessary.

## Coastal management

The need for a long-term strategic approach to natural resource management at the national level is clearly supported. In coastal estuarine and marine areas, the National Cooperative Approach to Integrated Coastal Zone Management is a good starting point for further strategic development.

- 5. 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:**

In terms of coastal and estuarine monitoring and information access, there is a gap in the capacity to share information amongst stakeholders nationally following the loss of the Marine and Coastal Community Network and its communication and support networks. The loss of regional coordinators adds to the general winding back of capacity to engage and support community.

- 6. The extent to which the Caring for our Country program represents a comprehensive approach to meeting Australia's future NRM needs:**

## Nature conservation

The inclusion of a funding component in the *Caring for our Country* program to complete the national reserve system is most welcome. As identified in the 2005 Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council Report: *Directions for the National Reserve System - A Partnership Approach*, it is seven times more cost effective to conserve intact native ecosystems than attempt to re-establish them after they have been cleared or significantly degraded. The next decade will be a critical period for biodiversity planning in Australia. The national reserve system cannot be built solely on public lands; there is a significant role for the private sector to play in protected area establishment and management. Protected areas need to be established and managed through an integrated approach at the landscape level. The involvement of the community and relations with neighbours are critical in the successful on-going management of protected areas.

## Coastal management

The Department also welcomes the Australian Government's establishment and commitment to the Community Coastcare program under *Caring for Our Country* and its potential for further alignment with local, regional, state and national priorities.

Overall, the Department is supportive of the *Caring for our Country* initiative and considers that a coordinated approach to environmental management in Australia based on a set of consistent national targets is needed.



for Scott Gadd  
**SECRETARY**

16 September 2008