

31 March 2000

Mr Bruce Turner  
Acting Director  
Strategic Policy and Planning  
Department of Natural Resources  
GPO Box 254  
BRISBANE QLD 4001.

Dear Mr Turner

**Re: Managing Natural Resources in Rural Australia for a Sustainable Future**

The Condamine Catchment Committee was formed in September 1992 (later incorporated as the Condamine Catchment Management Association or CCMA) as a result of community consultation on how ICM might be implemented in the Queensland section of the Murray-Darling Basin. The Committee is made up of 10 community members (skills base selection), and 4 special members (Department of Natural Resources, Department of Primary Industries, Environment Protection Agency/Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, and Darling Downs Local Government Association).

Since then a number of progressions have been made including incorporation in 1996 and the constant internal review of the way it conducts business. A major influence has been the development and on-going implementation of the Condamine Catchment Strategic Plan. This document has been used to promote sustainable resource management by identifying priority issues at the catchment level. Specific strategies and actions have also been developed to assist in the coordination of projects and on-ground activities.

The Condamine Catchment Management Association Inc (CCMA) would like to submit the following comments in relation to the discussion paper *Managing Natural Resources in Rural Australia for a Sustainable Future, December 1999*.

The outcomes of this paper are extremely important, not just for rural landholders or those managing public assets but for the nation as a whole.

It is very important that catchment communities are given the opportunity and the resources to evaluate their current situation and to forecast what might be the best options for them into the future. It is becoming increasingly difficult to operate within the existing state frameworks where substantial planning is taking place by regional communities but resources are being increasingly stretched (both community resources and funds to implement change).

Overall, we believe that more work is required to define just what levels of support will be provided by the State and Commonwealth as this would assist catchments to determine future partnership arrangements.

## **Principles**

We welcome the principles outlined in the document as a guide to the way forward and would like to include the recognition of the impact European culture has had on the way we manage our natural resources today.

## **Working together effectively**

It would be of immense value for Queensland to provide some sort of legislative backing for all the catchment groups that have been working on natural resource management planning and implementation. This would provide a mechanism to ensure wider community involvement and active participation of all stakeholder groups (eg local government) as it would be seen as having government support. This mechanism would also support the improved partnership arrangements that have been presented in the document.

It is stated that 'regional and catchment level strategies and targets would need to be in a form that provided guidance to landholders in developing their whole-farm plans' (page 27). We are already on the path where community developed strategies and actions provide guidance not only for farm planning, but also for the allocation of government resources and the coordination of activities between all stakeholders eg local government. This needs to be recognised.

It is essential that catchments be provided with the opportunity to develop an institutional framework that is conducive to the area for which it is to operate. Although the state may make the policy the system needs to be flexible enough to accommodate the structures that suit a particular catchment – not a state. Of course, some basic criteria may need to apply to enable a group to be 'recognised', or so their strategic plan can become 'accredited' ie eligible for government funding. It is of similar importance that the catchment community is in the primary position to negotiate with government and other key organisations for shared investment resources rather than this being a state responsibility.

There would be far reaching support for a system that 'minimises duplication between different levels of government, while ensuring that government investments are in line with their respective responsibilities' (p.31). Clear roles and responsibilities need to be defined across Commonwealth and State government to minimise existing areas of overlap to ensure activities are complementary.

Packaged or block funding is an excellent initiative which could result in greater ownership by all sectors of the community of their planning processes. It is a real opportunity for the region to move forward together. However, it will need to be clarified as to whether or not this can only be provided to regional groups that meet national and state natural resource management priorities.

Regional strategy accreditation is discussed further on p.31. It appears to be a bit back to front in that communities should be addressing government priorities whilst government is not required to give any consideration to priorities derived by the community. We support that accreditation should be based on meeting a set of generic criteria, making them eligible to receive packaged funding, however, this should not be limited to the sole purpose of meeting government priorities at the expense of addressing their own. The imperative for catchment groups to continue working together will decline if they can only receive benefits for addressing state and national government priorities. There would be limited support for catchment groups to take on greater responsibilities if it is not perceived to be part of addressing their own needs.

## **Devolving authority and empowering regions**

We would strongly support the concept that different models would be suitable for different regions. We suggest that catchment groups addressing catchment issues is the ideal scale to address issues of natural resource management (but note comments on local area priorities above).

The need for access to the 'best available information about a catchment's environmental, social and economic constraints and opportunities' (p.36) is essential. Too often information

is not widely disseminated or is collected at a scale where the information is of no real use. It is critical that information systems be developed and implemented that enable immediate access to, and use of, data that is available for good planning to occur. This information will also be essential in ensuring that: planning is based on good information, on-ground works are strategic in nature and there is no duplication in monitoring and evaluation exercises.

#### **Investing strategically at the regional scale**

This would be of enormous benefit to catchments but would need to be substantially externally resourced. The ever-increasing requirements for reporting and accountability are placing increasing pressure on community groups who in most cases have resources that are already fully stretched.

There also needs to be some recognition of the different priorities within different regions eg dryland salinity in the southern states compared to areas of Queensland. There needs to be some facility for catchment groups to address their own identified priority areas which may or may not be national/state priorities. By not recognising priorities in regions, it immediately undermines the good work that is being carried out and makes it difficult for groups to maintain motivation and commitment to the challenge.

We support the concept of strategic investment, particularly the shift from substantial rehabilitation to maintaining the current condition of our resources. The identification and acknowledgment of those areas not so degraded will require only limited funds to ensure long-term sustainable use. It is these areas that require future investment along with those of a more serious nature.

The benefits of government investment in whole-of-community derived priorities have the potential to be enormous. The wider social and economic flow-on effects have been underestimated in this document. Unless social and economic issues are also adequately addressed, effective natural resource management in many rural areas will not come to fruition.

#### **Facilitating fundamental change**

The identification and implementation of mechanisms to 'sustain the condition of the resource base', rather than constantly trying to rehabilitate, is again strongly supported. In addition, the raft of incentives and regulations must be better applied across all land tenures.

Vegetation management should not be the only resource given a priority for government investment. Although it is essential to integrated resource management the point remains that it needs to be integrated and not biased towards one issue or another.

'The need to minimise the dislocation and social costs of adjustment will, however, mean that fundamental land-use change will need the support and assistance of governments' (p.64). This statement is strongly supported.

#### **Building on Landcare**

Strong Landcare networks have already been developed in the Condamine Catchment. We recommend that government support of the current structures associated with the Landcare movement is continued. To provide increased certainty of resources available for groups would be very beneficial.

#### **Capacity building for improved natural resource management**

This concept is strongly supported. For this to be most effective, it is envisioned that areas of capacity must include the ability to manage trade-off between competing values, conflict resolution, skills required associated with changes to responsibility, accountability and leadership.

**Enhancing knowledge and information**

It is essential that all current data and future data is mapped at a scale that is relevant at the catchment level. Priority for future research should also be based on priorities identified at the catchment level.

Access to this data needs to be quick and data must be presented in a manner that is easy to interpret for those without specialist knowledge in a particular area. Presentation of information (base data collected) needs to be consistent over time so that trends can be easily identified. The communication of the results needs to be conducted in a manner that matches information to requirements, be it in different formats, at various scales and via different mediums.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Spence', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

**Mr Michael Spence**  
**Chair, Condamine Catchment Management Association Inc.**