



**Lower Murray Darling
Catchment Management Board**

Sustaining our natural resources

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The Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney, NSW 2000

The Honourable Pam Allan,

As Chairman of the Lower Murray Darling Catchment Management Board I would like to make the following submission to support the Catchment Blueprints and Investment Strategy as the most effective way forward to achieve natural resource management outcomes.

The Lower Murray Darling Catchment covers an area of 6.3 million hectares in the south west of New South Wales. It includes the lower NSW reaches of the Murray River and the lower reaches of the Darling River and it's junction with the Murray, the Menindee Lakes system, Lake Victoria and Willandra World Heritage area.

The Catchment Board has 17 members representing various interest groups including 4 agency members. The system has worked very well, with the Board airing divergent viewpoints but arriving at consensus in resolving a final direction or outcome. Changes to the role and composition of Boards have been proposed, including a skills assessment of members and reduction in agency representation. In this scenario it is likely that the make up of the Board would change and the implementation of the Blueprint would potentially be in doubt.

While some may argue that the Victorian model of Catchment Management Authorities is the way forward, as a person who has had ample opportunity to see the Victorian model at work I would agree that there are aspects that are good yet it is not the ideal model either. The Victorian system promotes duplication of services and staff, extensive use of consultants is expensive and time consuming, with often only another report to show for the investment.

The Lower Murray Darling community has invested two years in the development of the Blueprint that builds on 10 years of catchment management detailed planning and implementation of innovative community based projects for example Southern Mallee Guidelines, Mallee Sustainable Farming, Murray Darling Water Management Action Plan, Rangelands management Action Plan. In the preparation of the Blueprint over 180 presentations, workshops and meetings have been held for community, stakeholder groups, local government and interstate groups. Any further delays in Blueprint implementation will cause a loss of faith with the catchment community and the loss of the drive and momentum gained over 10 years of work by firstly Landcare groups which later evolved into Management Action Plan groups. This community now wants to know how much will be available for implementation and when the funds will be available. Already it is noticeable that the Blueprints are receiving very little mention in documents on natural resource management.

A primary disincentive that occurs in relation to ecologically sustainable land and water use is the common complaint of a lack of science. There may never be sufficient science for those who want only one outcome, science is always at odds over claims and counter claims, sample size, data interpretation and so forth. The LMD has demonstrated the effectiveness of community /agency

partnerships by engaging both science and community and taking the time to pursue practical and sustainable solutions at regional scale for example, 100,000ha of private conservation reserve has been achieved through the Southern Mallee Guidelines off set program.

The LMD Blueprint uses a combination of incentives to achieve the environmental outcomes embodied by the targets. Blueprint targets are achieved in different ways including:

- Incentives linked directly to targets. The greater the target results the greater the incentive.
- Recognition that industry plays an essential role by achieving standards eg irrigation efficiency and environmental standards
- Directly supporting greater indigenous involvement in nrm through nrm agreements
- Target foundation on sustainability issues (such as salinity, river regulation) while recognising biodiversity benefits will flow on from improvements to aquatic and terrestrial habitats
- Recognising individual land manager roles and responsibilities eg. Any incentives for rabbit, weed and pest control requires maintenance by the landholder
- Build capacity of landholders to manage better by providing training for biodiversity, irrigation and sustainable grazing.
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The greatest challenge is not a lack of science or community engagement but the sourcing sufficient funds to implement the programs needed.

The Board has been happy with the support and information provided by support staff based in the Dept. of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources, in both the development of targets, community consultation and investment strategies. Board members, the community and agencies have put countless hours into the development of the Blueprint and now, just when funding should commence, natural resource management is under review.

Catchment Management Boards were formed in response to the accusation of NHT 1 being a 'scatter gun' approach to natural resource management and that the time had come to *act* rather than to *plan*. Now we have an integrated system of Catchment Targets based on the SMART principle, activities to achieve those targets and monitoring to assess progress in order to amend the targets or activities if necessary (adaptive management). The Lower Murray Darling CMB is concerned that a vocal minority has been successful in gaining attention and that all Catchment Blueprints are being sidelined over what may well be deficiencies in only a few.

In closing I would like to state that a lot of good work has been done in natural resource management and that we should be very careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Yours truly,



Mark King, Chairman
Lower Murray Darling Catchment Management Board