

Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Management Trust

16 November 1998

Dr Neil Byron - Presiding Commissioner
Productivity Commission
LB 2 Collins St East
MELBOURNE 8003

Dear Dr Byron,

The Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust is pleased to make the following comments to the inquiry into implementation of Ecologically Sustainable Development by Commonwealth departments and agencies.

Integration of environmental, social and economic sectors

The Trust recognises that a broad approach across the environmental, social and economic sectors is necessary if ecologically sustainable development is to be achieved within the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment. To continue to treat ESD and its implementation as principally environmental issues is at odds with the concept of ESD as it fails to recognise the need to integrate environmental, social and economic components. Implementation of ESD must use integrating processes aimed at integrated outcomes where all three sectors are considered in relation to each other. For example much is made of the idea of an organisation value adding to its resources by forming partnerships with other organisations, groups or individuals. Such multiplier effects can be considerable as the following quotation illustrates.

The contribution of recreational fishing activity, including support industries, to Victorian economy in 1996, is estimated at \$1.265 billion and the provision of related goods and services generates approximately 27 000 jobs. This includes an estimated \$1.037 billion direct gross expenditure on recreational fishing activities in Victoria, including capital and per-trip expenditure, representing approximately \$200 spent for each kilogram of fish caught and kept.' (www.dce.vic.goc.au/fishing/rec/econvalu)

The Trust actively pursues value adding in undertaking its activities within the catchment. However, within the framework of ESD, these contributions need to be assessed for the impact of the increased economic activity on the environmental and social sectors. It can not be assumed that if there is a significant economic multiplier effect, there is also a positive ecological and/or social value added effect from such economic contributions.

Recommendation

A principal criterion for all departments and agencies should be that the activities, policies and resource allocations (economic benefits/decisions) have to add value to the environment with its different ecosystems and demonstrate social benefit as well.

Aid in implementing ESD

The Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust was established in 1993 as a result of widespread community concern about the health of the Hawkesbury-Nepean River system and its catchment.

Under the provisions of the Catchment Management Act (1989) and associated Regulation (1993), the Trust's charter is to:

- (a) encourage the protection and, where appropriate, the restoration of the Hawkesbury-Nepean River system; and
- (b) facilitate the ecologically sustainable use, development and management of natural resources, the floodplain and the built environment; and
- (c) foster orderly and proper physical, environmental and socio-economic planning and management as the basis for the well-being of the people and all life within the Trust area.

The Trust is undertaking a project aimed at establishing links between State of Environment reporting and the management plans of local councils. The establishment of such links will enable council and the broader community to monitor how council and other organisations are responding to pressures on the environment. Monitoring is benchmarked against sustainability goals relating to the particular environmental sector. Such an approach allows greater incorporation of ESD into council activities at a more detailed and practical level.

The Trust in partnership with local government and the University of Western Sydney-Hawkesbury is preparing four publications. These publications offer guidance to local government and are titled:

- 1. State of Environment Reporting Manual*
- 2. Preparing a State of the Environment Report: tracking progress towards sustainability*
- 3. Everything you wanted to ask about ESD but were afraid of the answer*
- 4. Pitfalls and Promises of Local State of the Environment Reporting.*

These publications would also provide guidance in achieving a consistent approach to implementation of ESD across departments and agencies and in assessing the

effectiveness of such implementation. At present these documents are in press and copies will be sent to you when they become available.

Recommendation

More detailed practical advice on implementing ESD needs to be developed enabling the principles of ESD to be applied in the day-to-day activities of all Commonwealth departments and agencies

Funding programs and ESD

A key Trust involvement with the Commonwealth is through the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) where it manages the regional bid for the catchment. Activities under NHT are guided by a series of principles that are compatible with those of ESD. However, there is little information available on how these principles should be interpreted and implemented and the NHT activities monitored and audited. As there is little guidance on ESD, it should not be assumed that each 'level' or those organisations or individuals involved in the NHT process (federal, state, regional, local and proponent) have a similar understanding and/or ability to ensure implementation of ESD. For example within NSW, there is not to our knowledge any published policy, position or guidelines to inform the practical application of ESD to NHT. This is probably the case across all states and territories. Without such guidance those involved with the NHT will either just repeat the principles of **ESD** or may develop their own potentially contradictory or conflicting interpretations.

The Land and Water Resources Research Development Corporation (LWRRDC) provides another example. This corporation has the following as part of its mission statement

'To provide national leadership in utilising R&D to improve the long term productive capacity, sustainable use, management and conservation of Australia's land, water and vegetation resources.' (www.lwrrdc.gov.au/aboutour.htm)

Sustainability is reflected in its Research and Development Plan 1996-2001 as well as group titles for research priorities identified in annual reports. While LWRRDC may include the Implementation of ESD in its assessment of applications for funds, the applications forms suggest that there is no requirement to show how their research outcomes will contribute to the implementation of ESD.

While recognising that the NHT or LWRRDC are not big enough to drive ESD, they are examples of programs that flow from the Commonwealth through different levels to individual members of communities across Australia.. If practical guidelines (addressing the connection between ESD principles and more specific activities) were developed for such programs there would be a number of benefits. They would provide greater certainty that the principles of ESD are applied 'on the ground'. The guidelines could serve as models that could be applied across the diverse range of Commonwealth

programs and be adopted by State and regional organisations. Finally they would provide practical advice to community members and greater transparency in decision making process would be achieved by funding organisations.

Recommendations

Practical guidelines for implementing ESD should be developed for such programs targeting the different parties involved. They should be promoted as a model for use in funding programs of other departments and agencies.

Where the principles of ESD are part of the policy of a funding program, applicants should be required to illustrate how the proposal furthers the implementation of these principles.

Management of Commonwealth lands

Throughout the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment there are many large landholdings in ownership of the Commonwealth (via its departments, agencies and corporations). These organisations over the last several years have been developing many of those landholdings surplus to their individual needs (eg. north Penrith army land and Werrington Signals site, ADI St Marys site, Air Services Australia land at North Cranebrook).

To allow the reuse and management of Commonwealth lands, it is necessary to apply practical steps for implementing ESD within each site but also between lands owned by different Commonwealth organisations.

Recommendation

The Commonwealth government should have a set of criteria or guidelines for these organisations that can assist them in ensuring redevelopment is consistent with the principles of ESD.

Finally the Trust's vision is of a healthy, productive and diverse catchment and river system. To achieve this, management of the catchment has to be sustainable in the long term. The Trust will be evaluating its own implementation of ESD in the near future through its Catchment Health and Assessment Project to assess the practical steps towards its vision in its own activities and its partnerships with the catchment community.

Yours sincerely

Peter Davey
Chief Executive Officer
Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust

