

“Catchments and us NSW”

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New South Wales water catchments are now having their third attempt at managing our natural resources each having come along with its own set of expectations.

This tells us that we may have the last chance to get Catchment management results that clearly demonstrate that as farmers we can work with and enhance the environment that we have been given to work with. The likelihood of farmers in particular not being able to input to a future CMA Model if the latest version fails is very real

Version 1

Total Catchment Management was centred around the distribution of Landcare funding by assessing individual applications and attempting to prioritise projects to fit the bigger picture on the run. Very much under resourced for the job but formed the basis for community involvement.

Version 2

Catchment Management Boards by necessity were rather large bodies that represented all sections of the community, were well resourced and fairly targeted in their approach. They developed Catchment Blue Prints after reasonably extensive community consultation. They operated under the consensus approach and as a result the work done became quite powerful community plans

Version 3

Catchment Management Authorities became much leaner with smaller representation and a proportional voting structure. Restructuring of DIPNAR has allowed each CMB to build its own team and combine with the landcare facilitators from previous life who are now called Natural Resource Officers.

My first thoughts were that this would be a natural progression and that we would be soon up and running with some serious natural resources issues on the way towards resolution. Recognise the good where it is and let's get into the bad and do something. Let us have local communities preparing local solutions.

As the process moved forward land managers and CMA's were soon to realise that that there were to be a plethora of small hurdles to be taken into consideration.

State-wide Standards and Targets
Natural Resources Commission
Catchment Action Plans
Property Vegetation Plans
National Action Plan
Natural Heritage Trust
Three Year Investment Strategies
Native Vegetation Bill
NSW Water Reforms
Water Sharing Plans
Floodplain Management Plans
Native Vegetation Reform Implementation Group
Natural Resources Advisory Council
NSW Government
Federal Government
Catchment Blueprints
Groundwater Management Plans
National Water Initiative
Water Innovation Council
Water Management Act 2000
Water Management Amendment Bill 2004

No short list by any means and probably one of the more serious impediments to the way forward, well at a local level anyway. They are however all players in the process as we move ahead.

The new setup should be a significant improvement on the previous system allowing for Natural Resources decisions to be made at a local level by people from within the regions.

A larger percentage of funding is to be spent with on ground works in a more targetted and accountable manner than previously.

Property Vegetation Planning.

A simple framework for preparing PVP, s is being developed by DIPNAR and will be available later in the year as part of the commencement of the Native Vegetation Act 2003.

They will be voluntary. However they will be a prerequisite when applying for Natural Resource incentive funding and when seeking offsets associated with vegetation enhancement proposals. They will be an alternative to development applications to clear any remnant vegetation that is not exempt under the above act.

PVP's will provide long term security so the native veg on your property can be managed for both environmental and financial outcomes. It will reduce the need for

repeated development applications to manage native veg and allow greater flexibility to proposed management option on your property.

A PVP will consist of a map (from an aerial photo or similar imagery) of your property and supporting documentation that outlines an agreement about your intended native veg management activities.

You will be required to request a PVP from your CMA and they will provide assistance with its preparation. An officer from the CMA will help you prepare your plan on site providing you with maps and relevant information about natural resources on your property. It will prepare as a team effort between yourself and the CMA officer.

Once you have this assessment and approval by your local CMA it will be an agreement under the act for the period agreed up to fifteen years and will be binding even if you sell out (or at least until the purchaser has a new plan approved).

A PVP cannot be taken away (unless there is a breach) and will not be affected by changes to local or State planning rules.

More details of this process and some definitions from the Government proposals are included for later however a couple of the Governments definitions are:

Native Vegetation

Any vegetation species that existed in NSW before European Settlement including trees, understorey, groundcover, saplings, scrub and shrubs

Regrowth

All native vegetation that has grown since 1990 (Accept in the western division)
There are no regulatory controls for native vegetation classified as regrowth and farmers can manage this vegetation as they see fit

Clearing

Defined as cutting down, felling, thinning, logging, removing, killing, destroying, poisoning, ringbarking, uprooting, or burning native vegetation.

Routine Agricultural Management Activities

Include control of noxious weeds and animals, the construction, operation and maintenance of rural infrastructure the clearing of vegetation planted for commercial purposes and the lopping of trees for fodder. These activities can be undertaken on any part of your farm.

I feel that as Cotton farmers with more intense agricultural practices we will be well placed for some incentive funding for managing those sections of the farm not used for cotton growing.

Funding

Funding for CMA does will have three main sources and some of the funding will come with strings attached.

CMA staff

Each CMA will have staff of about 20 who will come across from existing Dipnar positions as well as a General Manager and another 12 or so who will have been land care facilitators previously. Staff will be funded from Treasury via the Dipnar budget.

National Action Plan funding (by far CMA's largest) must have salinity based outcomes and as Salinity is the number one problem in many parts of the State we should have no problem with that.

It will mean however that people who apply for CMA funding will need to be mindful that many projects will need to have a salinity focus to be successful.

Natural Heritage Trust based funding needs to have a project focus based on Natural Recourse outcomes such as biodiversity. I'm not exactly sure what we sell when the Telstra money runs dry.

Projects hoping to attract money from these two buckets will need to be approved by both the State and Federal Governments via the three year investment strategies as put forward by each individual board.

This process will allow for the targeting of funding to areas within a catchment as identified in Catchment Action Plans with priority sub regions. The majority of the problems and section of the catchment they pertain to had been highlighted in the Catchment Blue Prints and were developed through a consensus and consultative approach of the Catchment Management Boards throughout the last three or four years.

The targets and action within these plans relate to and will impact upon a range of natural recourse parameters including water quality, wetlands, biodiversity, native vegetation, ground water and soils and will be adaptive plans with appropriate modification as new science comes along.

The implication for Macquarie Cotton Growers as a result of all the processes listed is that the major areas of concern in our catchment are the salt loads in the river are upstream issues and as a result will attract most of the funding. The benefit will be less salt applied to our fields at each irrigation with not a lot of Government funding heading the way of the floodplain.

NSW Water Reforms

New legislation in NSW will ensure that CMA's will have a role to play in determining the share of water available for consumptive users by their involvement in developing future Water Sharing Plans and in evaluating the outcomes of existing Water Sharing Plans and Catchment Action Plans.

CMA's will have roles to play in the effective use and monitoring of environmental flows with opportunities to develop further effective uses of environmental flows to help achieve targets identified in Catchment Blueprints.

Water management decisions with the involvement of CMA's should ensure that they are tailored to address local circumstances and that they receive a fair degree of local ownership.

Water Sharing Plans for the States major inland groundwater sources will come into effect next year.

An opportunity has been put before us to with the Catchment Management process to allow a commitment to conserving or improving the status of our natural resources while maintaining or improving the social and economic viability of the areas where we live and play, let's not waste it.

