

D. H. Moran → * Notes for meeting presentation.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL AUSTRALIA
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Catchment Management Authorities Act 2003

3 Objects of Act

The objects of this Act are as follows:

- (a) to establish authorities for the purpose of devolving operational, investment and decision-making natural resource functions to catchment levels,
- (b) to provide for proper natural resource planning at a catchment level,
- (c) to ensure that decisions about natural resources take into account appropriate catchment issues,
- (d) to require decisions taken at a catchment level to take into account State-wide standards and to involve the Natural Resources Commission in catchment planning where appropriate,
- (e) to involve communities in each catchment in decision making and to make best use of catchment knowledge and expertise,
- (f) to ensure the proper management of natural resources in the social, economic and environmental interests of the State,
- (g) to apply sound scientific knowledge to achieve a fully functioning and productive landscape,
- (h) to provide a framework for financial assistance and incentives to landholders in connection with natural resource management.

15 Specific functions

An authority has the following functions:

- (a) to develop catchment action plans and to give effect to any such approved plans through annual implementation programs,
- (b) to provide loans, grants, subsidies or other financial assistance for the purposes of the catchment activities it is authorised to fund,
- (c) to enter contracts or do any work for the purposes of the catchment activities it is authorised to carry out,
- (d) to assist landholders to further the objectives of its catchment action plan (including providing information about native vegetation),
- (e) to provide educational and training courses and materials in connection with natural resource management,
- (f) to exercise any other function relating to natural resource management as is prescribed by the regulations.

30A Environmental Water Trust Funds

(1) For the purposes of this section, the "**environmental water functions**" of an authority are any of the following functions of the authority:

- (a) the acquisition and management of adaptive environmental water under the *Water Management Act 2000* (including the acquisition of and dealing in access licences under that Act),
- (b) the improvement of water quality,
- (c) the carrying out of works to conserve water,
- (d) any other environment protection functions relating to water that are prescribed by the regulations.

(2) For the purposes of its environmental water functions, an authority may, with the approval of the Minister, establish an Environmental Water Trust Fund, to be called "[Name of authority] Environmental Water Trust Fund".

Vision for the Western CMA: Dynamic, viable communities and enterprises which support and sustain diverse natural environments and cultural values.

- While CMAs do not have a direct role in water allocation our Catchment Action Plan includes targets relating to water management and in particular the aquatic environment and salinity and water quality issues along the systems - because of this we have a strong interest in the impacts of water use and allocation. We have a long term interest in promoting, protecting and enhancing river, floodplain and wetland condition.
- Broadly the Western CMA is a “taker” of water from other catchments, not a “maker” of water within the catchment: annually it produces about 7% of the total flows
- The majority of the rivers are distinguished from those in the southern Basin by being classified as “unregulated”, that is there are no large headwater dams in which water is stored and then released for consumptive use when required. Regulated or partly regulated tributaries include the Macquarie, Namoi, Gwydir and McIntyre.
- Being “unregulated” the seasonality of flows is closer to natural patterns.
- The take of water for consumptive use, generally into large on-farm storages, is regulated by pumping access rules.
- Extreme variability of flow is a feature.
- The current flooding in the Condamine-Balonne system is demonstrating a near maximum extent of inundation on the Lower Balonne floodplain which totals some 1.5 million hectares, 1.2m of which are in the Western CMA. (The flood of 1890 was almost certainly a bigger one).
- We have a strong interest in the Intersecting Streams over-allocation issues relating to the, Culgoa, and Bokhara, Birrie and Narran river systems and their linkages to the Barwon Darling system. The natural resource values associated with these streams are a high priority for the WCMA. The complexity of the wetland and floodplain systems of these streams and also the linking of the Paroo and the Warrego through the Cuttaburra Basin is unique within Australia.
- Despite our high NRM interest we are strongly supportive of striking a balance between extractive use and the environmental values. Periodic flooding is essential to maintain the health of the floodplain environments and maintain their productive capacity for graziers and croppers. Over extraction can impact negatively on floodplains.
- Maintaining people in the landscape is a key to maintaining the environment and getting repair/rehabilitation actions being undertaken in the catchment. Without people in the system invasive species could dominate to the detriment of the overall environment.
- The dependence of the CMA on maintaining a good community base of support is imperative to implementing good catchment management.
- We have strong relationships established with the Aboriginal Communities of our catchment, primarily through our Aboriginal Reference Advisory Group (ARAG) and we would strongly support the Aboriginal communities being directly consulted on their values and concerns for the Basin.
- Robust/Resilient communities – need them in the landscape. Communities (towns) may become less resilient – loss of critical mass will impact on how the WCMA can achieve the goals of the Western Catchment Action Plan.
- Event flow management with an agreed set of rules would appear to be a good approach for the unregulated systems.
- Certainty is needed for the irrigation industry to plan and invest in. Currently the irrigation investments on the unregulated system are almost ‘unsaleable’ due to the lack of certainty for the future. There have been several years of this uncertainty eg. CAP on the Barwon Darling took many years to get sign off by Minister(s), and Water Sharing Plans under the NSW Water Act still have not been completed. Ministerial cuts in entitlements have occurred despite previous agreements under the MDB CAP negotiations, and uncertainties continue under the MDBA Basin Plan process.
- Lower Balonne floodplain issues – concerns with the effects on the floodplains and the obvious impact on the environment and grazing industries of over extraction in Queensland - The Western CMA has

invested over \$600k in studies by Uni of Canberra (Martin Thoms) to better understand these impacts on the systems of the Lower Balonne. This followed earlier contracted work on a Scoping study of the Lower Balonne floodplain and the multidisciplinary study of the Narran Lakes commissioned by the Murray Darling Basin Commission

- A similar Scoping study was contracted by the WCMA on the Warrego River.
- Investigations have also taken place on the Riparian and Wetland Management priorities of the catchment. (Jennifer Hale's work). All these, and other reports are available on the Western CMA website: www.western.cma.gov.au
- Drought is when competition for the scarce water resource results in conflict between the environment and other water users. This is when a clear, agreed plan of extraction priorities is needed.
- Works on efficiency of water delivery, storage, and use is a key area that is lacking in the Plan (is this referring to CAP or Basin Plan?) and it is difficult for the widely dispersed irrigation industry of the Barwon Darling to get any traction on this issue. (Include reference to \$400k spent on on-farm efficiency?)
- Demographic studies would be useful to track the impacts of changed water access for this unregulated section of the MDB.
- Climate change and its impact on the existing and/or planned use of water from the system is poorly understood and the impacts on the Barwon Darling system needs to be factored into any planning - the boom/bust nature of this system could be accentuated into the future under some of the projections - will this have a greater or lesser impact than the current extractions? This is pretty much an unknown.
- Models and modelling processes of river flows are under question and must be strengthened, if confidence in the modelled predictions is to happen.
- The Irrigation industry has lost about 67% of pre-CAP entitlements and are uncertain as to future entitlements.

Daryl Green,
General Manager
Western Catchment Management Authority