

17 May 2002

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**CORANGAMITE CATCHMENT
MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY**

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Dear Jane,

Healthy Rivers Healthy Communities and Regional Growth Victorian River Health Strategy

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Victorian River Health Strategy (VRHS).

I would like to commend you and the Waterway Unit for your efforts in the development of an excellent document. The Corangamite Catchment Management Authority fully supports the principles and framework for the long term protection and restoration of rivers in Victoria.

The Authority acknowledges that the release of the draft Strategy has resulted in significant National attention and recognition that Victoria has set the benchmark for protecting river health.

One of the key strengths of the draft Strategy is that in the one document it clearly and concisely articulates key issues and threats that agencies and the community must address as part of river health improvement. The link that has not been included in the target audience is the broader community which has the responsibility for implementing the majority of the actions arising from the VRHS and the Regional River Health Strategies (RHS). I would recommend that you consider the development of an additional abridged version that could be circulated in the community.

The Corangamite Catchment Management Authority supports the Victorian River Health Strategy however, the continued transfer of responsibilities to CMAs are resulting in the transfer of operational funds to cover corporate costs. This process will continue to erode the ability of CMAs to implement the state and regional River Health strategies and their resultant targets unless these issues are properly addressed.

Further detailed comments are contained in Attachment 1.

If you would like to discuss these comments please contact the Waterway Program Manager,
Dr David May on 5232 9119.

Yours sincerely,

Donald A Forsyth
Chief Executive Officer

Encl.

HEALTHY CATCHMENTS - HEALTHY WATERWAYS

Securing Our Future

Corangamite Catchment Management Authority
Submission on
Healthy Rivers Healthy Communities and Regional Growth
Victorian River Health Strategy

General Comments

The introduction to the Strategy clearly articulates many of the specific issues water resource managers are currently facing. It also highlights that many of these issues are not being debated in the wider community.

Continual reference to community based decisions and assessment of achievements highlights the realisation that communities want ownership of waterway management. The preparation of a version for reference by the community should be seriously considered.

The presentation of the document is good and is greatly assisted by the use of boxes highlighting key issues. The diagrams probably need to be bigger so they are more easily read. Relevant photographs would be good to break up the wording. Additional colour would greatly assist the presentation of some figures.

The stated scope of the VRHS clearly includes terminal lakes and wetlands however the text does not adequately deal with the complex issues associated with the management of these components of our river systems. The inclusion of this material in the VRHS could produce an unwieldy and cumbersome document, however in omitting the detail and still attempting to address lakes and wetlands there is a risk that these issues will not be adequately dealt with during the next decade. The CCMA would like to see a separate process recommended to ensure that lakes and wetlands are able to meet the environmental, economic, recreational and cultural needs of current and future generations.

Specific Comments

Strategy Background

Page 31 Figure 2.3 - No legend is attached.

Page 36 Figure 3.4 - Potential for increased water-based economic activity. The Otway Basin is listed as having “high” potential for increased water based economic activity, although the colours are indistinct. What factors are considered when making these recommendations? Is available discharge simply compared to current commitment or is the nature of the catchment considered also? The protection of short ephemeral coastal Otway streams is a priority for the region.

Vision for Victoria’s Rivers

The CCMA supports the philosophy of “highest environmental and community gain for resources invested”. We will need to be aware of potential conflict when asking the community to step back from their expectations for action in their immediate environment while supporting action elsewhere that is for the greater good. It will be vital to recognise this risk in consultation strategies to minimise localised impressions of a lack of action.

Specific Management Issues

The realisation that maintenance of our water resource is dependent on ecological health of waterways has no doubt influenced water resource management at the regulatory level. Unfortunately the message has not reached the resource users. We are still being told that water that flows off the farm is wasted water. Our challenge is not simply to balance economic needs with ecological needs – it is selling the message that ecological management is not radical but fundamental.

Comments – Chapter 5: The Integrated Management Framework

Overall the chapter is very well written and well thought out. It is clear, concise, relevant, realistic and all encompassing. It sets out a clear and achievable goal.

Chapter 5 falls within Section 3 - This is a bit confusing. Maybe the sections should be removed to avoid confusion with chapters.

The VRHS proposes the development of regional RHS. It is anticipated that these strategies will identify the assets and values to be considered in all river-related action plans. Potential threats to these assets will be identified and overall health objectives and targets developed. For these strategies to be implemented in the most effective manner at an operational level, managers will need a tool that allows the 'agreed acceptable' risk to assets be quantified. This would assist defining the risk to environmental and social values as well as economic values. For example, if a development is proposed to occur upstream of a Ramsar wetland, what frequency of flood event should be planned for to protect the environmental values of the lake? The CCMA encourage the VRHS to include a recommendation for the development of such a tool.

Modeling comparative risks may be a useful tool. A framework for this modeling should be included in the VRHS that gives some rigour for regional decisions about development threats and relative values.

It is important that the strategy has recognised that streams of high community value are just as important as rivers of high environmental value. It also recognises the value of rivers as entire river systems not just looking at the reach perspective. The triple bottom line is re-written as “significance to rural communities and their place in regional economies” – this is a much better way of putting it. This approach is much more realistic and user friendly.

Priority for river protection, restoration has been well thought out. Real community commitment is recognised as being fundamental to the process.

Page 54 – box outlining the requirements of the regional RHS is well presented and promotes the information appropriately. Additional comments have been provided through the Waterway Managers Forum.

Box 5.2 – how is this to be monitored and evaluated? Some reference to this issue should be included.

5.2.3 - ...It is important that this impetus and goodwill is not lost and that the proposed arrangements are not seen as ‘another planning exercise where nothing ever happens’ This is a key issue which needs to be communicated to the community as a part of the review of regional RHS.

5.2.3 last paragraph - Explains the current problems with the triple bottom line. This should probably be highlighted.

5.2.5 - The community side of the partnership needs a stronger focus as the lack of community participation will result in significant delays in implementation.

Chapter 7: Management of Water Quality

Overall the chapter is well set out in a logical sequence. Again the bold type in the boxes reiterates important points.

7.1 last paragraph – Highlights the need for community education and ownership / commitment.

7.2 dot point 4 - Loses its meaning as it is too long and confusing. Could add in two other dot points:

- Community education / commitment?
- Monitoring and evaluation?

7.3 the last dot point in the box - is missing half of its sentence.

7.3 - The new arrangements will enhance community ownership and triple bottom line..

7.3.3 dot point 1 – The term ‘assets’ can cause confusion as it can mean environmental as well as infrastructure etc. this has caused some inconsistency as it makes people think in terms of economic values rather than environmental.

7.3.3 box – This is good, however, monitoring and evaluation could be built into this.

Chapter 8 Management of Riparian Land

Section 8.1 - Explained extremely well. The points in this section are informative and relevant. The boxes are a great idea from a summary perspective.

Section 8.2 - Well written and it was important to see that the issue of a management framework raised and highlighted.

Section 8.3 - The grazing issue is raised. This issue maybe suitably addressed in a subsection, as it is important and many landholders do not understand the implications of stock grazing on their riparian zone. This issue should be discussed as a separate section so there is a clear statement that it is acceptable providing it is within a well managed framework.

The Native Vegetation Plans state there will be a net gain in vegetation retention.

The partnership approach subsection 8.3.2 is of a clear and concise nature and leaves no one in doubt as to responsibilities, which can only be a positive. Another positive also is the utilisation of priority within the strategy (values / threats). The exotics section was also explained concisely.

Section 8.4 - Very well articulated section written on floodplain linkages. It is good to see that this strategy recognises other waterway documents and ties in with their work (eg Victorian Floodplain Management Strategy). This section is not re-inventing the wheel, it is outlining a clear direction for river health.

Chapter 11 – Management Arrangements

Box 11.1. Local Govt role – This will be a key task of CMAs to build an effective partnership with local government and will certainly be more difficult in municipalities with a lower rate base.

The two dot points following box 11.1 are good. However funding is also a factor. Industry and individual participation depends a lot on community and individual wealth / market equity. Community education / awareness is also a factor.

11.1.2 - The CMAs are responsible for taking an Integrated Catchment Management approach to waterway management and developing partnerships with other stakeholders. Community education is also an important function. (This has been explained in other sections but it may be relevant here as well).

11.3.2 dot point 4 Undertaking Works – Should willow removal be included here?

Good points/aims to be emphasised:

- That the community has an understanding and knowledge about the issues that affect river health.
- That capability within the waterway management industry to deliver the strategic outcomes described in the VRHS is further developed (and consistent).
- A three year rolling training program for waterway management professionals to improve their skills and abilities in relation to riverine management will be facilitated by NRE in conjunction with waterway management professionals.
- A monitoring program designed to measure progress in achieving State and, more particularly, regional objectives and targets.
- Research program aimed at improving our understanding of river health processes and management responses.
- More easily accessible catchment data for the community.

