

16 October 2003

Rod Anderson
Chairperson
National Task Group on the Management of Climate Change Impacts on Biodiversity
Greenhouse Policy Unit
Department of Sustainability and Environment
Level 13 - 8 Nicholson Street
East Melbourne 3002
VICTORIA

Dear Rod,

Consultation Paper – Developing a National Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan

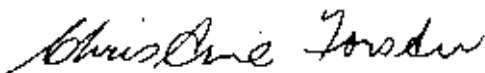
Thank you for your attendance and briefing regarding the consultation paper at the Victorian Catchment Management Council meeting on 18 September.

The VCMC congratulates the National Task Group for preparing the consultation paper to compliment and support other significant state and national activities in the areas of biodiversity and climate change.

Please find enclosed a submission on the consultation paper from the Victorian Catchment Management Council.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact the Executive Officer, Lisa Munro on (03)9412 5028.

Yours sincerely



Christine Forster
Chairperson

Consultation Paper – Developing a National Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan (NBCCAP)

Submission by the Victorian Catchment Management Council

The VCMC is the State Government's peak advisory body on catchment management. Catchment management involves the sustainable use and management of land and water resources at a catchment level.

The VCMC was established in 1997 by the Victorian Government under the *CaLP Act*. The Council is uniquely placed, independent of government agencies, regional catchment authorities and non-government organisations, to take a long term view and influence change in working towards its vision for catchment management –

Victoria will have healthy rivers flowing through ecologically sustainable and productive catchments.

Council takes a statewide view on land and water issues and priorities related to catchment management. It facilitates integrated and coordinated catchment management through Victoria's catchment management framework.

The VCMC works closely with DSE, DPI and EPA. Council is also working to strengthen strategic catchment management planning by increasing collaboration with Local Government.

The VCMC also encourages cooperation of bodies such as Non-Government Organisations involved in the management of land and water resources.

Council has a role in providing a report on Catchment Condition for the State and produced '*the Health of Our Catchments: A Victorian Report Card*' last year.

The Victorian Catchment Management Council is pleased to submit the following comments on the consultation Paper – Developing a National Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan.

1. General Comment on Structure

- The general structure of the paper is positive. To ensure abbreviations are easily followed from the beginning - it would be more useful if the page listing them was at the front of the document instead of in the appendices.
- The Guiding principles are positive and clear.
- The Context is well articulated in the need for a national approach.
- The proposed structure based on The National Objectives and Targets for Biodiversity Conservation 2001-05 is supported as being a clear framework
- The Appendices are clear and effectively support the document.

2. Responses to Proposed themes

Strategy 1: Incorporate adaption to climate change as a key component of core business for all natural resource planning and management.

Theme 1.1 Integration with natural resource planning and management processes

Question 1. How can planners and decision makers be assisted to be up-to-date on regional climate change scenarios as these affect biodiversity?

- Improved integration between all levels of government (Australian, State and Local), and Catchment Management Authorities will ensure the latest information is shared and responded to appropriately. The VCMC has recently completed a project called Integrating Local Land Use Planning & Regional Catchment Planning (funded by NAP with the Municipal Association of Victoria & VCMC as the partners). The report can be found on the MAV website: <http://www.mav.asn.au/catchment/>

Question 2. Should planning make provisions to mitigate adverse impacts where the likelihood of occurrence is relatively high?

- Agreed with recognition that appropriate support to implement planning is required.

Question 3. Are there examples of planning that could offer useful models on risk management here?

- (Accreditation process as via the National Action Plan and the Natural Heritage Trust which incorporates appropriate risk management?)

Question 4. What current natural resource planning and management processes could consideration of climate change impact on biodiversity easily fit into?

- Victoria's Catchment Management Framework can effectively incorporate climate change impact on biodiversity.
- The Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS) documents set the strategic direction for natural resource management at a regional level. Management of environmental issues involves planning measured in timeframes which cross generations. In Victoria, this long-term planning is supported through a process of adaptive management that includes comprehensive review and renewal of RCS documents every five years. Long-term planning constitutes a 20 – 50 year vision and plan.
- VCMC recognises that there is an on-going need to develop a strategic plan for the future management of resources at a statewide level. Victoria needs a vision for its rural landscape underpinned by a State, investment plan and whole of government implementation plan. The release of the Metropolitan Strategy provides clear opportunities to link the implementation of the urban strategy with the development of a rural strategy.
- A state integrated natural resource management strategy of the future must focus on designing catchments and landscapes for sustainability. The planning timeframe for such an activity will need to be long-term, probably 20 or even 50 years, to allow the community to adapt and adopt new ideas and management paradigms.
- Currently DSE Strategic Planning & Sustainability Policy division are undertaking the first steps in developing a state wide Integrated Natural Resource Management (INRM) investment framework. The VCMC is fully supportive of this initiative and further information on this topic is provided in '*the Health of Our Catchments: A Victorian Report Card*'.

VCMC suggests an additional question be added:

- "How can planners reconcile potential impacts of long term scenarios with short term planning cycles?" This could be considered in terms of risk management models.

Theme 1.2 Facilitating integration with planning and management processes

Question 5. What is the type and level of information required?

- In order to understand the implications of a changing climate, it is important to develop models that predict climate change at a sufficiently detailed spatial scale. These climate projections need to become the basis for further detailed studies that interpret the consequences of an alerted climate for catchment conditions, water resource management, agricultural land use, biodiversity resources and infrastructure needs.

Question 6. Is there sufficient quality data to allow regional decision-makers to identify species, communities and ecosystems at risk from, or threatened by, climate change impacts?

- Victoria has invested in a partnership with CSIRO that is delivering spatially relevant high-resolution regional climate projections for Victoria, and supporting supplementary studies that build on this information to better understand implication for alpine systems, selected agricultural commodities and selected biodiversity resources. This work needs to be extended on a regional or catchment basis. Of particular priority are studies to understand future water availability on catchment basis and consequent effects on natural and agro-ecosystems.

Theme 1.3 Performance and priority setting

Question 7. Setting priorities for biodiversity conservation:

- a. **Is the decision analysis approach discussed in *Sustaining Our Natural Systems and Biodiversity* (Morton *et al.* 2002) a useful methodology for setting priorities to address climate change impacts on biodiversity?**
 - Yes
- b. **What do natural resource managers and planners need to assist prioritising action?**
 - Integrated tools for modelling impacts as discussed

Strategy 2 Maintaining ecosystem structure, function and processes.

Theme 2.1: Species, communities and ecosystems

Question 8. Are the principles and assumptions underlying the National Reserve System appropriate given current climate change predictions?

- Yes

Question 9. What are the main impediments to the migration and dispersal of species?

- Reduction of suitable habitat due to various threatening processes and impacts.

Question 10. Is it practical to establish reserves in anticipation of future climates (ie. in areas that do not currently meet biodiversity conservation objectives)?

- In some cases, yes

Question 11. Will market based mechanisms such as taxation incentives be a useful tool for establishing future habitat?

- Definitely. We have also heard success stories regarding Auctions for Conservation Contracts with the Bush Tender Trial in Victoria targeting high-priority habitat areas.

Question 12. How do we identify populations, species and/or ecosystems to target for these actions?

- The primary overarching legislation with biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of native flora and fauna is the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988, administered by the Department of Sustainability and Environment. The Act remains the landmark biodiversity legislation in Australia and is designed to address biodiversity issues on both public and private land.

Question 13. How do we ensure the genetic diversity of species is maintained to enable future autonomous adaptation?

- The aim of the FFG Act in Victoria is to ensure that our native flora and fauna survive, flourish and retain their potential for evolutionary development in the wild.

The VCMC suggests an additional question specific to buffer zones:

“What are the considerations/issues associated with the implementation of buffer zones and what conditions should invoke their establishment?”

Theme 2.2 Migration and dispersal

- 4th & 5th dot points - Specific actions regarding landscape-scale habitat restoration and removing impediments are very broad. Suggest follow the previous dot point and each action begin with. "Develop and promote incentives for landholders to facilitate the implementation of.....and likewise to.....preface the 5th dotpoint "Remove impediments to migration.

Strategy 3. Improve our understanding of future climates, climate change scenarios and likely impact on biodiversity.

- The VCMC suggest that Strategy 3 should be Strategy 1 - as it prefaces preceding strategies.

Theme 3.1: Monitoring and evaluating impacts

Question 14. Climate predictions:

- c. How would climate predictions improve management and decision-making processes?**
 - Together with the species functional resilience modelling it would minimise uncertainty and allow best possible prioritisation of actions particularly for the most vulnerable species, resource assets & activities.
- d. Is there sufficient biodiversity data to use with climate predictions to support decision-making?**
 - Other threatening processes need to be considered in conjunction with climate predictions.
 - Current climate projections need to become the basis for further detailed studies that interpret the consequences of an alerted climate for catchment conditions, water resource management, agricultural land use, biodiversity resources and infrastructure needs.

e. **Would the data be reliable?**

- Data provided so far has been reliable as possible. Further research is required to ensure reliability of data.
- Timing and reporting requirements also need to be considered.

f. **At what scale would this information be most useful?**

- Regional – for prioritisation of investment.
- Also need to consider accessibility of information to land managers.

Theme 3.2: Predicative capability for climate change and variability (scenarios and impacts)

Theme 3.3: Monitoring, evaluation and research priorities

Question 15. How do we take the ideas and strategies discussed at a conference (as suggested above) and implement them?

- Establish a dedicated Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Group to ensure appropriate implementation occurs. Members could consist of those already discussed eg. NAP, NHT, Aust. Research Council and CRC's etc.

Question 16. How are research results interpreted and implemented for natural resource management - how is the science heard and converted to action?

- This is an issue which the Victorian Catchment Management Council is currently investigating and a report will soon be released.

Strategy 4. Communication: building awareness, understanding and capacity.

Theme 4.1: Communication strategies and networks

Question 17. Who should communication be targeted at (eg. individual landholders, producer groups, Landcare/NHT/NRM Facilitators and Coordinators, policy officers)?

- All networks – it is too important an issue not to involve everyone.

Question 18. In your experience, what are the most effective communication strategies that could be used for disseminating information on climate change impacts on biodiversity?

- There are a range of communication strategies available and there is not a “one size fits all audiences”. Careful consideration is needed for different capacities.

Theme 4.2: Informing decision-making processes in planning, management and implementation

- The prediction tools could be expanded in this section

Question 19. Are the actions presented above the right measures to address climate change impacts on biodiversity? If not, what additional actions would you suggest?

- Important to use these measures in conjunction with addressing other threatening processes eg. Salinity.
- Suggest the link here should also be back to initiatives aimed at reducing our impact on climate change - to close the loop.

Appendix B - Guiding Principle 4

The Rationale doesn't really elude to importance of actions at regional and local scale and capacity, which would make it difficult for respondents at the regional or local level.