20 May 2005

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Vegetation Management Policy Section
NRM Policy Branch
Department of the Environment and Heritage

Via fax: 02 6274 1332

OCEANWATCH
FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR MARINE ENVIRONMENT

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Dear Ms O'Leary

Submission re: National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation

This letter sets out Ocean Watch Australia Ltd's (Ocean Watch) comments in relation to the Department of Environment and Heritage's (DEH) National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation (NVF). Ocean Watch is an environmental, non-government organisation sponsored by the commercial seafood industry to represent the environmental interests of industry with respect to protecting and restoring fish habitats, improving water quality and promoting sustainable fisheries.

We believe that the current NVF has a very strong terrestrial focus and clearly recognises the links between the preservation of terrestrial vegetation and sustainable rural industries. However, only minor reference to aquatic vegetation is made throughout and no recognition is given to the role aquatic habitats plays in sustaining fisheries production and fishing industries.

Response to DEH's specific areas of focus

1. ***Did you use the NVF in 1999-2005? How was it useful and/ or what information was lacking?***

No. Ocean Watch has only recently become aware of the NVF.

2. ***Do you have any suggested improvements for contextual information and strategic content eg. vision, principles and desired outcomes?***

Within the contextual information, an acknowledgement of the crucial role that conserving biodiversity plays, not only in sustaining agricultural industries, but in also sustaining fishing industries is required. There needs to be explicit recognition of the strong links between aquatic vegetation/habitat and fisheries production. For example, recent studies have shown that seagrass generates in excess of $US19K/ha/annum (Morton, 1990)

and mangroves in excess of $AU8K/ha/annum in terms of commercial fisheries production. (Costanza *et al*; 1997).

3. Improvements for information on best practice mechanisms and attributes, gaps and case studies to illustrate suggestions

Rehabilitation and restoration

Ocean Watch considers that training should be provided for environmental and community groups such as Bushcare, Landcare, Conservation Volunteers Australia and Greening Australia to enure that native vegetation rehabilitation and restoration programs/projects provide benefits to aquatic habitat and that projects are implemented to specifically restore habitat. Ocean Watch is currently managing a project, "From Tide to Table" whereby a Community Landcare Officer (CLC) has been employed to train groups and the community on how to ensure they incorporate protection of aquatic habitat and aquatic systems. The CLC will support and foster partnerships between Landcare Groups, the fishing industry, community, local government and key stakeholders to implement natural waterway rehabilitation works which directly benefit fish habitat. The resultant changes in habitat condition and water quality etc will be reported and monitored over time and communicated to relevant stakeholders and to the broader community.

There are many other examples of rehabilitation works that directly benefit aquatic habitats that have occurred through partnerships between the fishing industry, local councils and landholders etc and organisations such as Wetland Care Australia, and the NSW Department of Primary Industries - Fisheries (DPI). The NVF needs input from organisations and agencies such as these to ensure that any projects involving rehabilitation of aquatic vegetation or fish habitat are in line with current best practice methods.

Section 4.2.1 – Vegetation Inventory, Data Collection and Mapping.

To identify spatial and temporal data gaps and to build on current databases, state agencies such as DPI and the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (DIPNR) (and equivalent agencies from other states) need to be consulted. Currently, there is insufficient long-term monitoring of the status and condition of aquatic habitat at a fine enough spatial and temporal scale to detect changes from anthropogenic activities. (Ocean Watch agrees that any monitoring program must include or should be preceded by a data collection and collation phase to establish relevant baselines against which assessment of changes can be made).

For example, there are no water quality monitoring sites within Murrah State Forest catchment areas, southeast NSW, despite studies confirming high sedimentation rates from forestry operations. Nor is there any monitoring or assessment conducted on the resultant impacts on the lower catchment in terms of sedimentation, siltation, resultant delta growth and degradation of aquatic habitat. This requires long term monitoring to detect changes occurring in the lower catchment from upper catchment activities.

Section 4.4.1 – Community education

The message that "no habitat = no fish" needs to be conveyed and communicated to the community. The broader community needs to recognise the links between aquatic habitat, fisheries production and sustaining the professional fishing industry so that everyone can have access to and can enjoy fresh, wild, locally caught seafood. Parallels can be drawn between agriculture and fishing.

Section 4.4.2 – Research and development and extension.

The fishing industry needs to be more involved in research and development. The fishers are experts on the day-to-day hydrodynamic conditions of the waterways, and observe first hand any immediate changes in water quality and aquatic vegetation. This information may be crucial in formulating projects and for determining appropriate monitoring programs. Currently, Sydney Water Corporation is liaising with the Hawkesbury Trawl Association to determine the nature of currents in the Hawkesbury River that will affect the dilution and dispersion of discharged effluent from a proposed sewage treatment plant.

4. ***What do you consider to be the main native vegetation management and monitoring issues in Australia for the next 5 years?***

In relation to aquatic habitat:

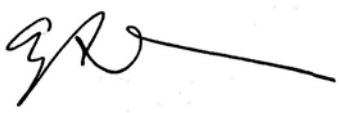
- the continued decline in aquatic habitat (seagrass and saltmarsh and in some cases mangroves) due to rapid expansion of coastal development, particularly along the east coast of Australia;

- greater recognition of the value of fish habitats and the roles they play in sustaining the wild harvest professional fishing industry from Commonwealth, State and local governments and the broader community; and

- obtaining sufficient resources to adequately map, assess and monitor (using long term data sets) the status and condition of aquatic habitats (including marine and estuarine) at a fine enough spatial and temporal scale to detect changes from activities.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on (02) 9660 2262 if you would like to discuss these comments further.

Yours sincerely



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