

COOPERATIVE RESEARCH CENTRE FOR



CATCHMENT HYDROLOGY

Project 8.2 Public Participation and Community Change

Project Objectives

Open and meaningful public participation in research, planning and decision making on the management of catchments can contribute to the social, economic and ecological health of catchment systems. This project seeks to achieve this goal by identifying ways in which a wide sense of community ownership and involvement in catchment issues, and responsibility for them, can be encouraged throughout society.

Expected Outcomes

- Understanding of social, economic and political influences on community attitudes to catchment issues
- Understanding of principles and processes that facilitate public participation in research, monitoring and management related to natural resource issues
- Understanding of drivers of effective social learning and change through participation
- A web-based handbook of processes, strategies, case studies and guidelines for participatory approaches, developed in partnership with the CRC for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterways Management

Target Problems

The value of stakeholder involvement in natural resource management is recognised in both policy and legislation. However, problems are emerging in practice, chiefly related to a poor understanding of the social, economic and political influences on stakeholder participation and their motivations.

This project will enhance the strategic focus of the CRC through the development of a framework and practical strategies for enhancing public ownership of issues and problems in the CRC Focus Catchments. This will be achieved through strategies that encourage informed and appropriate participation in research, planning, policy development and decision making.

Based upon top-down models of expert-lay interaction and the 'public understanding of science' movement, past approaches have not led to the actions required for successful environmental change. This project will develop frameworks and strategies that reflect participatory and action learning models for achieving this.

Thus, this project will seek answers to such questions as:

1. How do social, economic and political factors influence public attitudes to catchment issues in natural resource management?
2. How can these perceptions be refined through integration of stakeholders as partners in environmental research and management projects so that science-based approaches to decision making are privileged?
3. How can building capacity in communication and public participation enhance this process?
4. How are public participation and community change issues being developed in catchment areas at the present time? What are the best practice lessons from these examples?
5. What additional strategies can be used?

Research Plan

Answers to these questions will be sought through collaboration with the CRC for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterways Management, which has a similar range of concerns within its Citizen Science program.

www.catchment.crc.org.au/education



The Cooperative Research Centre for Catchment Hydrology is a cooperative venture formed under the Commonwealth CRC Program between:

- Brisbane City Council
- Bureau of Meteorology
- CSIRO Land and Water
- Department of Land and Water Conservation, NSW
- Department of Natural Resources, Qld
- Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Vic
- Goulburn-Murray Water
- Griffith University
- Melbourne Water
- Monash University
- Murray-Darling Basin Commission
- Southern Rural Water
- The University of Melbourne
- Wimmera Mallee Water

Associates:

- Hydro-Electric Corporation, Tas
- SA Water
- State Forests of NSW

A case study approach will be used to analyse key themes and issues in public participation, and to develop a practical toolbox of strategies for participatory research and decision making. The toolbox will include a review of existing research, an analysis of decision making approaches and the legislative bases and strategic plans of key resource management agencies, examples of best practice (nationally and internationally), and guidelines for the use of innovative processes for enhancing public involvement.

Case studies will focus on themes related to:

- social, economic and political influences on community attitudes to catchment management (Fitzroy Basin)
- the use of strategic partnerships in resource management (Pumicestone Passage)
- the roles of volunteers in Integrated Catchment Management
- effective communication between researchers, resource management agencies and other stakeholder groups
- the development of strategies for participatory research that links researchers and community stakeholders in science/evidence based resource management

Key Research Tasks for 2000-2003

- Identify examples of 'best practice' in catchment management in Focus Catchments
- Analyse social networks, scope stakeholder perspectives and survey social, economic and political factors that influence public attitudes to, and perception of catchment issues in the upper Fitzroy catchment in partnership with CRC for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterways Management research in the lower catchment
- Develop a model of influences on decision-making processes and the establishment of criteria for quantitative measurement of attitudes, knowledge, values and aspirations for application in other CRC Focus Catchments in post-2003 phases of the research
- Conduct case studies of strategies for communication and participation, participatory research and adaptive management, and the roles of volunteers in catchment management
- Integrate case study themes into theoretical framework and toolbox of strategies for effective partnerships between researchers, agency staff and community stakeholders in catchment management

Linkages

This project complements research in CRC Program 3 (Water Allocation) as well as in Theme 2 of the CRC for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterways Management. The project is also closely integrated with the CRC's Communication and Adoption Program, as it will contribute research-based processes for this work. It also links with the communication and education programs of the South East Queensland Regional Water Quality Management Strategy (Brisbane City Council), and the Waterwatch and Integrated Catchment Management programs of all states and territories in Australia.

End Users and Stakeholders

This project complements the CRC's Communication and Adoption Program in developing the understanding and adoption of the CRC's research outcomes among all stakeholders in the CRC and the wider catchment industry, and to build their capacities to utilise these results.

Staff Involved

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