from Local Watershed Management to Integrated River Basin Management

Reflections on 30 years of Australian experience

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Outline

• Disclaimer
• Reflections on my experience in the Australian context
• Thoughts on governance
Personal declarations

• Farming background south-western Victoria, Australia
  – Family farming in the district since 1860s, own farm managed 1987—
  – 450ha: 30% farm forestry, 10% environmental reserves, 60% leased to a neighbour for prime lambs

• Forestry & rural sociology: Creswick, Melbourne & Wageningen

• Forester Victorian government, Manager Potter Farmland Plan 1984-88

• First National Landcare Facilitator 1989-92

• 5 years as a Senior Executive in Australian Government

• 7 years as CEO of a national research funding authority

• 4 years as an independent consultant

• 2 weeks as a Professor, Charles Darwin University in Darwin…

• I don’t know what to do in Australia, let alone the Mekong…
Where have we come from?

• **22 years ago**, Prime Minister Hawke announced the Decade of Landcare and a 30-fold increase in Commonwealth funding for community-based Landcare groups ($340 million)

• **A bipartisan political commitment, with a decade of funding**

• **1980s-1990s: the Landcare decades**
  — >5,000 voluntary community groups
  — involving more than one-third of all farming families – more than two-thirds in many districts
  — cooperative work across farm boundaries, neighbourhood group extension, bottom-up approaches
  — community-based monitoring (WaterWatch, SaltWatch, FrogWatch etc)
  — Landcare ‘caring hands’ brand recognition >85% in urban communities
  — Considerable corporate investment through Landcare Australia Ltd
Widespread community engagement

In schools, with young people

In community-based monitoring
Farm and watershed planning was widespread

Linking farm-scale actions to watershed outcomes – especially river health
Where have we come from?

• 1996-2007: consolidation of a national approach
  – Scaling up to the catchment or regional level;
  – 56 regional/catchment bodies (WMOs or RBOs)
  – Trying to take a more integrated approach at landscape scale
  – National investment shifted from millions to billions

• 2007— asset-based investment approach
  – Identifying environmental assets (priorities)
  – Business plan approach to investment in the highest priorities
  – Market-based instruments, private nature conservation etc
  – Competitive tenders to purchase specific environmental outcomes
Where are we now?

- **2010:** Launch of the Community Guide to the new Murray-Darling Basin Plan
  - Ten year drought highlights water allocation problems
  - Top-down attempt to define sustainable diversion limits for all valleys in the Basin
  - Landcare and catchment (watershed) groups excluded from process
  - Badly received by stakeholders and the community
  - Chairman of the Board resigns
- Landcare moribund in many areas
- Catchment (watershed) organisations also struggling
- Community appetite for water reform waning
Many landcare groups now tired, like this sign
Observations

• Three approaches from 1980s – 2010:

  1. Voluntary, bottom-up, neighbourhood-scale landcare groups (5000+)

  2. Regional/catchment (watershed) organisations (56) (Multi-Stakeholder Platforms [MSPs])

  3. Targeted investment in environmental assets, and payment for environmental services (PES) through competitive tenders and market-based instruments
Observations (2)

- **Three approaches from 1980s – 2010:**
  1. Voluntary, bottom-up, neighbourhood-scale landcare groups (4000+)
  2. Regional/catchment (watershed) organisations (56) (Multi-Stakeholder Platforms MSPs)
  3. Targeted investment in environmental assets, and payment for environmental services (PES) through competitive tenders and market-based instruments

- Implemented in sequence, not in parallel, displacing the previous approach, rather than building on it. **Huge mistake**

- These are complementary, not alternative approaches.

- Bottom-up approaches are not sufficient, but they are essential

- **We have to continue to nourish the grass-roots — forever!**

- **We have to move beyond single-issue approaches**
Coliban Water emissions per Megalitre

- Note water supply emissions have increased tenfold in five years.
Climate-Carbon-Water-Energy-Food
the bigger picture

• If you are in the food business, you rely on water and energy
• If you are in the water business, you are in the energy business
• If you are in the energy business, you will soon be in the carbon business
• If you have not analysed the potential interactions between these drivers into the future, you are in for a nasty surprise
• **This has profound implications for governance**
Governance

“How society shares power, benefit and risk” (Xing)

• Vertical and horizontal
• The challenge of integration
• Need to honour the past and respect local values, without being shackled by them
• The tyranny of lowest common denominator consensus
• Local institutions are essential, but not sufficient
• As everything becomes more interconnected, better governance becomes more vital, and more difficult.
Ideas for distributed governance

“In order to discover new lands, one must be prepared to lose sight of the shore for a very long time”*

- Leadership at all levels
- Networks and communities of practice across sectors, scales, disciplines, basins, nations
- New technologies, to share information, at all levels
- Building social capital that dilutes rigid divisions
- Hard-wiring involvement of schools, civic society (clubs etc)
- **Good governance is a great investment**

* André Gide 1925 *Les Faux Monnaieurs*
For more info: www.triplehelix.com.au

e.g. The Getting of Knowledge
Managing Australian Soils
Paddock to Plate [policies for sustainable food systems]
Climate change primer [for WMOs & RBOs]