

Defining and improving a partnership approach to natural resource management

Bruce Cumming

Natural resource management is a complex and challenging area of work. To be effective in an enduring way, a range of success factors need to be in place. One important factor is the partnership between the range of relevant government agencies and between them and the community. Some of the issues associated with partnerships are quite manageable, while others are dynamic, complex or otherwise difficult. Some of these issues might even be thought of as jointly incompatible, antagonistic or unmanageable.

This article outlines a process adopted to define, evaluate and improve the essential partnership arrangements for natural resource management. The work was carried out within the Shepparton Irrigation Region portion of the Goulburn Broken Catchment in Northern Victoria.

Need for a partnership: While a formal integrated Catchment Management Strategy has been in place in the region since 1988, and partnership arrangements have been seen as important, the more formal definition of partnerships did not commence until 2003. Perhaps this definition did not occur earlier due to the fact that relationships were seen broadly as being healthy, or perhaps documenting it was seen as a difficult task. Meanwhile the external operating environment was changing with new issues arising, including significant policy change and long term drought. However the greatest threat to the partnership was potential loss of key staff, for instance through retirement, and the evidence that partnerships in some other areas were under strain.

Setting up the partnership arrangements: The first step in defining effective catchment partnerships was to reflect on the purpose, goals and achievements of the Catchment Strategy while considering the essential characteristics and behaviours of key parties when partnering successfully. These key parties were involved in directing, managing and participating in implementation of the strategy and involved government agencies and the overseeing community bodies, committees and boards.

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The essential characteristics identified included the implicit and sometimes unstated issues associated with organisational values, and with the supporting processes or agreements. These had rarely been discussed, acknowledged or documented previously. The purpose of the work described here was to make them explicit, well defined, agreed, documented and in a form which would allow them to be evaluated to track progress and provide insights for improvement.

Eight key principles of effective catchment partnership: Following a period of discussion and reflection, eight principles emerged. Briefly these are:

- **Mutual benefits:** All parties benefit in their dealings with each other.
- **Collaboration:** Cooperation is used instead of competition.
- **Good governance:** We make good decisions and manage processes well.
- **Acknowledgment and respect:** We recognise and advocate for our partners.
- **Roles and responsibilities:** Our boundaries are clear and understood by each other.
- **Differences:** We identify and resolve our negative differences early, and welcome diversity.
- **Commitment:** We have a shared long-term vision, dedication and trust.
- **Communication:** It is open, honest, ongoing, formal and informal.

These principles in their fuller form were refined and accepted by the various agencies working with catchment management. Ultimately the principles and a commitment to them and how they would be expressed was formally agreed to in a Memorandum of Understanding and signed by the Department of Primary Industries, the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority, the Goulburn-Murray Water Authority and the

Environmental Protection Authority.

Evaluation, review and improvement are intrinsic to sustaining complex delivery programs like that described here. In order to do that for partnerships, an evaluation process was designed for assessing catchment partnership health. The evaluation method adopted is called Goal Attainment Scaling. It is a process which originated in mental health, and allows an assessment to be made of qualitative or multi-dimensional issues.

A range of five levels of responses are determined which are possible outcomes when observing a particular issue. They include the most likely, or expected, result and two levels higher and two levels lower than the 'expected' level. A Goal Attainment Scaling matrix was developed for assessing the partnership against each of the eight principles of effective catchment partnership outlined briefly above.

Ongoing improvement and learning: A series of processes is currently under way to assess the health of the partnerships in all the governing and overseeing bodies and committees within the Shepparton Irrigation Region. This information is being collected and analysed to give insights and help lead discussion on improving working relationships and governance across the broad range of work within the catchment.

Some key learnings which have emerged from the review processes include: a shared understanding of partnership principles is imperative; involvement in development leads to internalisation of the principles; the evaluation process provides strong guidance to strengthening the partnerships and their performance in delivery. There is a strong commitment to ongoing improvement.

For further information on catchment partnerships or Goal Attainment Scaling, contact Bruce Cumming, DPI, Tatura, 03 5833 5357.

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The theme of this issue of *ExtensionNet* and the thinking of the APEN Management Committee at present is Partnerships, strategic alliances, working together. Bruce Cumming's article is about the partnerships between Agriculture and the Natural Resource Management sector in the Goulburn Valley, there is a short piece

about Greening Australia and our strategic alliance with them, photos supplied by APEN members are examples of Ag and NRM working together as are Jeff Coutts article on Facilitation Cards and Anne Jones article on working with members of our network.

We welcome all our new members and feature Rohan Nelson, Renee Manning and Tafi Manjala.

Articles for ExtensionNet are always welcome. Instructions and the date when articles they are due in are on the back page. Happy reading!



APEN's partnership (or strategic alliance) with Greening Australia

The APEN Management Committee felt that a partnership would be beneficial for both APEN and Greening Australia (GA). David Carr from GA commented that he had always used "extension" and the main interest was how people learn and share knowledge – whether they are from an NRM, Ag or health (for eg.) background they can learn from each other. To APEN Extension means the process of enabling change. GA is interested in changing behaviour, enthusing and informing communities, and their Members are served through exchange of skills, tools and theory.

The tangible outputs and outcomes for the alliance are considered to be:

- a. Reciprocal access to each group's newsletter to inform members of current affairs
- b. Exchange each group's events and activities calendar through newsletter and other appropriate communications
- c. Reciprocal support and promotion for each other's events, where appropriate and a win: win advantage is demonstrated. In the short term GA is holding a major conference in Toowoomba, 19-23 October 2008. There are 12 workshops and the conference has workshop, plenary, paddock and sum up sessions over 4 days. See the website for more information: <http://www.greeningaustralia.org.au/vegfuture/>

APEN involvement could be by presentation, running a workshop or being a participant.

- d. GA already sponsored a session at APEN's Forum07 and this experience of collaboration was considered successful and a taste of further issues to explore across the NRM and Sustainable Agricultural divide.



One of GA's programs is called Exchange. **Exchange – the national vegetation knowledge service**, is helping regional groups and land managers find information, look at new ways of doing things, tap into research and meet people who are addressing similar issues managing native vegetation.

Exchange is an Australian Government initiative supported by the Natural Heritage Trust and delivered by Greening Australia.

The main features of the service are:

1. Bush Tracks Online

This provides links to research organisations and reviews of extension publications relating to natural resource management.

2. Comprehensive Directories

Native Vegetation and Regional Management and Native Vegetation and Property Management identify research and resources for native vegetation management. They are available on the Greening Australia website www.greeningaustralia.org.au

3. Enquiry Service – Call Exchange on 1300 886 589

If land managers want to know something about native vegetation management, they can call the Enquiry Service and have someone locate the information. It's like having your own librarian. Questions can also be emailed to Exchange.

Further information contact is available at the website; exchange@greeningaustralia.org.au or telephone 1300 886 589



Australian Government
Land & Water Australia

AG & NRM Working Together

These are the photos that were sent in when we asked members through the eBulletin for photos that would show APEN's focus on production agriculture, NRM, regional and community development, nature/environment etc as well as our focus on people. The idea is that they may be used on the APEN website when its look is revised. Send any further examples you may have or comments to Roe: info@apen.org.au



The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries run best practice groups in all the major Australian macadamia production areas. The photo shows one of the Lismore groups discussing orchard floor management. In the picture, they are focussing on soil surface management (particularly ground covers and manure and compost management). The purpose is to improve soil health, minimise soil erosion and improve orchard productivity.

The person 2nd from left in the photo is Kevin Quinlan from NSW DPI, an APEN member. The other people in the photo are grower members of the best practice group. The person speaking on the right of the photo is the manager of the property where the photo was taken.



New Zealand extension researchers and New Zealand local government NRM staff visiting a site along the Mary River catchment through Gympie in Queensland.



A group of farmers in the Ohariu Valley near Wellington learning about poplar pole planting along the edge of a wetland from Regional Council staff.

Getting value from the Network

Anne Jones,

Development Officer, Department of Agriculture and Food WA, Albany WA

People will travel for hundreds of kilometres to glean knowledge from an expert, it seems. Or so was the experience when Dr. Ian Plowman came to Albany in February. Extension professionals travelled from as far away as Northam (440kms north) and Bunbury (360kms north west) to hear Dr Plowman talk about motivation, behaviour and their impact on innovation and change.

This is proof that being part of the APEN Network really does have valuable benefits, as it was through contact with fellow APEN members that this event came about. One APEN member found out about Dr Plowmans background and intention to visit Western Australia from a colleague. Recognising that other APEN members might get a lot out of seeing what Dr Plowman had to offer he circulated to other members an email suggesting that we had a great opportunity to take advantage of a visiting specialist. Another member canvassed her own professional networks to see if this would be the case. The idea gained a lot of interest and the workshop was set to go.

For those who haven't had the opportunity to hear Dr Plowman speak, he is a psychologist with a lot of experience with social research and facilitation. Dr Plowman was very accommodating when approached about fitting in an APEN event into his already busy schedule (I don't think that he had anything more than an evening to himself in the

two weeks that he spent in WA) and easily blended the various aspects of his work that we particularly wanted to know about in his half day workshop. He produced a dynamic half day workshop that was custom made for the audience.

There was so much information introduced to us in the workshop that the conversations are still raging. So much of what Dr Plowman had to say felt familiar, but shed a new bright light on so many aspects of the way people behave and the conflict that arise between people with different motivations. If anyone would like a copy of the notes from the workshop then please drop me a line at ajones@agric.wa.gov.au.

I'd encourage everyone in the Network to take advantage of the Network wherever you can. After all, we're all part of the Network for very similar reasons and what can benefit one member is likely to benefit many others. It's easy to give a little back by sharing the opportunities.

ExNet

Right: Ian Plowman explaining the difference between data and information. The black and white splotches in the picture behind look like random data until you realise that it's a picture of a cow. Then it becomes information.

Below: The group doing the "four determinants of behaviour" questionnaire. There were some soul searching questions in that quiz!



Grouping Cards

Facilitators and trainers take note!

Jeff Coutts

About Kerry Bell

Kerry Bell is director of Bellmetrics - an evaluation, analysis and training business – with a strong quantitative focus. Before starting her own business in 2005 she had 14 years experience as a biometrician with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries. She has been a trainer for the University of Queensland Evaluation course for the last 6 years.



A new and innovative concept for placing people in groups as well as a tool for icebreakers, warm-ups and energisers, is now available.

Simply called 'Grouping Cards', this is exactly what they do - using symbols, patterns and pictures, anyone running group activities (eg training, meetings, discussion groups, even social functions) can easily and creatively divide people into up to 10 groups.

Grouping Cards creator, Kerry Bell, originally developed the cards as a training aid, but quickly saw further potential.

"In my experience, when you are running a course and want to group people for activities, it can be frustrating and many times people end up being in the same group a lot of the time."

"These Grouping Cards have been computer generated to ensure that you can mix everyone up, however you like, almost as many times as you like."

The cards are a colourful array of symbols, shapes, animals and people, which Kerry explains can all be used to create groups.

"For example, you can divide into groups of black and red, or animal groups, or by a type of symbol, or anything else you can see on the card."

The cards are accompanied by a manual and booklet showing the many ways the cards can be used. The manual also

provides tables detailing different ways to create smaller groups according to the number of people in the original group.

Experienced facilitator and trainer, Dr Jeff Coutts, says that the cards are a breath of fresh air.

"I have found them fun and effective in breaking course and workshop participants into small groups – and the range of options ensures that good mixing occurs over the time period."

"They have also proven to be effective in warm-up activities and adding an extra zest to the program."

As well as being an educational tool, the grouping cards can also be used for group activities and to play card games, for example - patience, fish, snap, charades and group dominoes.

A regularly updated games and activities booklet is available for download from the Grouping Card's website.

For further information or to order your Grouping Cards email kerry@bellmetrics.com.au or visit www.groupingcards.com.au

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New APEN members

If you've recently joined APEN, welcome! You'll reap plenty of professional and personal rewards. If you've been in APEN for a few seasons now, be sure to say hello to the new members.



Dr Rohan Nelson

*Agricultural and Natural Resources Economist
Research Group Leader, CSIRO*

Dr Rohan Nelson is an agricultural and natural resource economist specialising in making environmental science and economics relevant to communities, industries and governments. He works across disciplines, particularly with scientists and social scientists,

to provide integrated analytical support for decision making by farmers, natural resource managers and policy advisers. This includes designing science and governance systems that support rural communities and industries in their ongoing efforts to adapt to global change.

Rohan joined the Sustainable Ecosystems Division of Australia's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) as a resource economist in January 2006. He manages a multidisciplinary team of 11 economists, climatologists, ecologists and farming systems researchers in the Agricultural Landscapes Program of CSIRO's Division of Sustainable Ecosystems. He also supervises a number of project staff and PhD students in Australia and internationally, including 3 staff in Bangladesh.

He joined CSIRO from Land & Water Australia where he coordinated the Managing Climate Variability research and development funding program. MCV is a multi-million dollar industry-government partnership funding R&D in the management of climate risk in agricultural production and natural resource management. Rohan has a keen interest in research program design and creating innovative research cultures responsive to changing community needs.

Prior to joining Land & Water Australia, Rohan was an Agricultural and Natural Resource Economist with the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE). With ABARE, he led socioeconomic research into the resilience of Australian rural communities to the risks arising from markets, climate variability and threats to the natural resource base. He has particular expertise in aligning the supply of NRM information with the needs of decision makers, and the socioeconomic influences on the adoption of new technologies.

In other roles with ABARE, Rohan managed ABARE's commodity forecasting and forestry economics sections where he led the strategic development of commodity forecasting and agricultural trade modelling, particularly for world grain markets. He pioneered the introduction of seasonal climate forecasting to Australia's national commodity forecasting research and development.

Rohan has considerable experience in climate variability research and extension, and is strongly networked with Australian researchers working on climate risk management. With ABARE he broke new ground with the development of policy relevant applications of seasonal climate forecasting, including a capacity to forecast the impact of climate variability on farm incomes across Australia.

Prior to working with ABARE, Rohan led the Whopper Cropper project with the Department of Primary Industries in Queensland, delivering grain growers the benefits of crop modelling to improve the management of climate risk Australia's northern grain regions.

Rohan's PhD research in the mid-1990s with the University of Queensland involved using the APSIM cropping systems model to analyse the risks of maize farming in the Philippine uplands from soil erosion, climate variability and maize prices. He continues to apply his skills in developing countries as opportunities arise that align with his Australian commitments.

Rohan has undergraduate degrees in economics and forestry from the Australian National University in Canberra and he decided to join APEN after taking part in the Forum07 at University House, ANU. He thought the people at the Forum were a brilliant group of practical people driving change.



Renee Manning

Renee works in the NRM field at the Department of Agriculture and Food in Merredin, Western Australia. She graduated with a degree in Environmental Health from Curtin University in 2003, and then took up a position at DAFWA in water management! In 4 and a bit years at DAFWA, she has been involved in a number of projects, from a Waterwise=Saltwise gardening book to providing advice to catchments and communities about all things water, to acting as district manager for a short time.

Renee's current role involves closer interaction with the community and industry programs to progress Ag-NRM integration. She is keen to increase her networks and knowledge in the extension field, as she feels extension professionals are well placed to facilitate this "integration". She is undertaking post graduate study in Regional Development through UWA to get a better understanding of the how regions work, react to change and hopefully grow!

Welcome to these new members who have joined since last edition. We're glad to have you on board.

Brigitte Lacey	WA
Lance Brown	Vic
Janice	
Mentiplay-Smith	Vic
Tafi Manjala	New Zealand
Greg Shannon	Qld
Paul Carmody	WA
Renee Manning	WA
Alastair Rayner	NSW



Tafi Manjala

Tafadzwa Manjala (aka Tafi) is a DairyNZ Extension Regional Manager based in Whangarei which is in the North of the North Island in New Zealand. Tafi manages a team of 6 consulting officers delivering extension to dairy farmers with the main aim of increasing farmer adoption of current and new technology. Prior to this role Tafi was a consulting officer for 3.5 years in Whangarei West and some of the highlights of that period was leveraging off leading farmers to disseminate best practice messages through group discussions, field days and seminars; partnerships with other service providers such as Vets in delivering at farmer events. Tafi is still responsible for 3 farmer groups and uses the interaction to keep in contact with farmer needs. Outside work Tafi enjoys spending time with his son Rufaro (6 yr), daughter Rosa (21 mnths) and wife Whitney plus playing sport.

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Guidelines and deadlines

Submissions should be made in MS Word 6.0 with minimal formatting. A portrait photograph of the author is required. All photographs, figures and/or tables ought to be provided as separate files (preferably TIF or JPEG; photos scanned at 300 dpi). Feature articles should be around 1000 words and minor articles 500 words. The editor reserves the right to edit submitted material to meet space restrictions. Letters to the editor or general items of news of interest to the network are welcome. Articles should be submitted at least four weeks prior to publication.

Preference is given to articles that are grounded in some form of project or event.

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