

Engaging indigenous communities in integrated catchment management in New Zealand

In partnership with the OECD Studies on Water: Stakeholder Engagement for Inclusive Water Governance

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Organisation: Canterbury Regional Council

Country: New Zealand

Level of government: Regional/State government

Sector: Environmental protection

Type: Organisational Design

Launched in: 2009

Overall development time: 6 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

The Canterbury Regional Council launched an engagement process with district councils and the Maori tribal authority to develop and implement the new Canterbury Water Management Strategy. It aims to: i) deliver environmental, economic, cultural and social outcomes together; ii) shift from individual effect-based management to integrated catchment management; iii) develop a collaborative governance framework whereby “local people plan locally.”

Identification of tribal, and in particular sub-tribe members, as legitimate stakeholders was a fundamental aspect of the governance framework. The region was divided into ten areas with a dedicated committee in each zone, made up of representatives from district and regional councils, the local community and local runanga (i.e. sub-tribe). The runanga representation on these committees depended on their definition of their rohe (sphere of responsibility). Most committees have, on average, 13 members with the number of runanga representatives varying from 1 to 6, depending on rohe.

Each committee is tasked with developing solutions to deliver on the strategy targets by 2040, and developing an implementation programme and recommendations related to drinking water, irrigation, ecosystem health, water-use efficiency, energy security, etc. By involving indigenous communities, the engagement process aims to improve water management that meets their aspirations as well as social and cultural cohesiveness. It also aspires to develop a new collaborative approach to decision making in which people from a variety of interests in water come together and develop solutions that meet all expectations.

Why the innovation was developed

- Water management is a politically contentious subject in New Zealand at national and regional level, and has been particularly acute in Canterbury for the last decade or more.
- All parties were motivated to find better way of dealing with the issues, and now that the Canterbury Water Management Strategy has provided a political space for the full spectrum of stakeholders to participate are motivated to be involved in order to advance or protect their interests.
- The targets out to 2040 clearly specify the range and scale of outcomes that are being sought, and the collaborative process has provided opportunity for people to identify alternative pathways to achieving community driven outcomes. Stakeholders have recognised the level of change required will have major implications for them, and that now is the time to be involved.
- The key drivers that triggered the engagement process were: high levels of concern about deteriorating water quality in Canterbury, concerns about the reliability of water supply and dis-satisfaction with the adversarial approach to water management.
- The community at large had reached breaking point due to over-allocated water resources, pressure from droughts, and degrading water quality. Moreover, the community were entrenched in an adversarial 'lose-lose' approach to conflict. In one catchment alone the community spent \$10 million (NZ) fighting itself for a lose-lose outcome.
- The expected outcomes are 1.) improved water management that meets the communities aspirations and improved social/cultural capital/cohesiveness. The water management outcomes expected are based on the 10 targets (see Q.2), for example, Increased Irrigated Land Area and Improved Ecosystem Health of Lowland Streams; and 2.) A change to a collaborative approach to decision making - people in the community from a variety of interests in water, come together and develop solutions that meets all their aspirations together.
- Governments
- Service providers
- Water institutions
- Regulators
- Business
- Agricultural sector
- Civil society
- Science, academia and research centres
- Indigenous people
- Recreational and environmental organisations

Results

Efficiency

- Broader economic development: Consensus by the community on water management is paving the way for broader economic development. For example – in one Zone, the agreement on environmental limits, environmental restoration, and infrastructure development, is set to increase the contribution to regional GDP by a projected \$300M NZ pa.
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Effectiveness

- Sustainability/resilience: One of the key drivers behind the CWMS was disenfranchisement with the water management decision making/governance. Therefore a significant tangible benefit is the involvement of approximately 120 people directly in 10 committees is governance. And moreover the fact that these people have all reached consensus on water management in all 10 cases and that this consensus has been 'followed through' on – into statutory plans and non-statutory work programmes. (NB a great number more community are engaged with directly by the committees – e.g. 12 committee members and 70 wider community members involved in workshops hosted by the committee).
 - Capacity-development: The tangible personal benefit most frequently quoted by members of our governance groups is personal development of their own skills, knowledge, and appreciation for alternative views. This is a very (possibly the most) enduring tangible benefit.
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Service quality

Responsiveness:

- Acceptability/ownership of stakeholders involved: One of the most tangible benefits is ownership – for managing to limits, improved land management practice, environmental restoration and so on. For example – one collaborative group, supported by the wider community have agreed to a wider rating base to support the maintenance of a key water infrastructure asset. This measure has universal agreement – to be rated! This would never have happened if the regulator had proposed rating. Another example is ownership of a key water management intervention – augmentation of a lagoon. The wider community have now developed a package which includes increased irrigated land area, catchment load limits that allow for development, and the augmentation of a lagoon to improve its health. The augmentation is an integral part of this package developed by the community – the community itself will have to pay for and build the augmentation infrastructure – not the council. This can only happen due to the strong local ownership of their solution.

Development

Design

The project was initiated by the mayoral forum (local and regional councils), and developed by a steering group with representatives from the Councils, Ngāi Tahu (tribal authority), central government, and stakeholders representing interests from irrigation, farming, public health, wider community, and environmental, economic and recreational organisations. (The regional council has statutory responsibility for management of water and the district councils for drinking water and land management.)

Once signed off by the regional and all district councils, the regional council has taken responsibility to implement the governance structure and drive the engagement process, but in partnership with the district councils and Ngāi Tahu (Zone committees are joint sub-committees of regional and district councils).

Testing

- No methods were used to test the innovation
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Implementation

Tools used:

- The CWMS uses a very wide range of engagement mechanisms to inform and involve a large number of stakeholders and individuals.
- These include e-newsletters, public community meetings, mail out to all rural residents, field trips and a large number of workshops and meetings with different interests (usually multiple meetings with each group).

Resources used:

- The CWMS committees are funded by the Regional Council and District Councils through rate funding. Rates are based on the capital value of properties. The most substantial public expenditure is the supporting staff who provide facilitation, science, run community engagement, biodiversity grants, establish catchment groups, infrastructure advice etc.
 - Many other parties also provide information and assistance to the CWMS committees – including government science agencies, primary sector and environmental advocacy groups, government departments, universities, irrigation schemes and development entities. The time from agencies is funded by themselves.
 - Central government provides funding for large restoration projects and to assist with feasibility assessments for large infrastructure. Evaluation of the participatory process itself has to date been ad-hoc with some interest from Universities, and central science agencies – both of these receive funding from central government. Evaluation of how the CWMS is meeting its targets is funded by the Regional Council through rates.
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Challenges and solutions

- Development/deliberation: The variable capacity of community members to understand and assimilate information and then to turn that into meaningful solutions. This includes complex biophysical, cultural, social and economic data. The time that community members have to dedicate to the collaborative process. For example during the period of developing recommendations on environmental limits a committee would meet twice a month and often more – in a variety of meetings, workshops and field trips
- Implementation/operation: Staff time to commit to the project. Staff are often required to long hours and often work evenings each week to support the project. To overcome community technical capacity we have specialist facilitators who take the role (amongst other roles) of fostering a shared understanding of complex technical information – using a variety of tools. These facilitators also actively 'hold space' so that voices that are not well represented or articulate, are able to be heard. We also actively support members to ensure everyone has a chance to contribute on the same footing.
- With regards community time capacity, we pay a small honorarium to committee members <\$5,000 NZ pa. This does not recompense the time invested nor the importance of the contribution and time capacity remains an issue for a number of community members. The solution to staff time, has been to recruit dedicated staff and provide time in lieu for overtime worked. We are currently exploring new tools with government to evaluate collaborative processes.

Lessons Learned

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- Be very clear about what level of engagement the promoter (facilitator) and targets (participants) are expecting. The engagement staircase provides a guide to this.
 - Be very clear about the lines of decision making and get commitment and clarity from governors before beginning. Get clarity on overlapping roles and governance before embarking.
 - Be prepared to 'hold a space' for stakeholders who may not be well resourced or articulate. The promoter needs to facilitate engagement – not just engagement for the organised and powerful. Be very clear about the scale at which you are operating – hydrological, social, government scale.
 - There is no magic scale and it needs to be nuanced to local conditions. Match the level of resourcing to the step on the engagement staircase and be prepared to 'spend more on catering to spend less on lawyers'.
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Conditions for success

- A commitment from the promoter to 'follow through' with the results of the engagement.
 - Clarity about what level of engagement is being promoted.
 - The development of, or a base built on, collective aspirations for water management.
 - Investment in enabling the range of parties/people with a stake, the opportunity to engage.
 - Investment in the professional facilitation of the engagement process.
 - Transparency with information and technical data, and transparency in process.
 - Trust or social capital which is either built up through the engagement, or previous capital which is used to enable the process.
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Other information

The expected outcomes of the process are happening at a range of scales. From local solutions developed by consensus to vastly improved social and cultural capital. In all cases the multi-stakeholder groups have come together, worked effectively and reached consensus.

In most situations, this has involved parties that were previously at loggerheads – engaging in shared understanding of aspirations and values. And in some situations the collaborative approach has spilled over into circles outside of the formal committee structure, such as groups of farmers working together and councils working together collaboratively.

Delivery of the water management outcomes such as improved water quality and building of infrastructure, follow the consensus around these and thus take longer to come into being. Four Zones have now developed catchment load limits for nutrients which are being embedded in statutory plans.

The most significant examples of success include consensus around major water infrastructure projects and around environmental limits. In one Zone the collaborative group concurrently developed an alternative water storage option (to the one that had produced protests in the streets) and environmental limits for a for a catchment. This was done by consensus and enables a significant increase in irrigated area and the protection of the recreational value of a river.

The success that has been achieved, we believe, is due to: the existence of a strategy which contained shared aspirations before the establishment of the collaborative governance, the commitment that local people make to developing solutions, the commitment of the regional government governors to follow through on the local consensus recommendations, and the commitment of staff to work relentlessly to support and facilitate the collaborative approach. For more information, visit www.canterburywater.org.nz.