



5TH NATIONAL WATERWATCH CONFERENCE

Notes from Panel Session, 29 November 2007

1 INTRODUCTION

This session aimed to provide all conference delegates the opportunity to look back on the strengths and achievements of Waterwatch and to look into the future and pose the question:

What is Waterwatch's role in this landscape of policy and practice?

The objective of the session was to identify how Waterwatch can respond to the challenges and opportunities inherent in these emerging issues and set a course toward a sustainable, effective and relevant initiative within future Natural Resource Management (NRM), community engagement & sustainability education programs.

Specifically, the session was designed to identify what we need to do, at regional, state and local scales to realise the potentials for Waterwatch identified by the panel members and participants.

1.1 Panel Members

Five people from diverse roles within the broader NRM effort were invited to give their perspectives on Waterwatch through this Panel Session:

- o Prof. Paul J. Perkins AM, chair of National Environmental Education Network
- o Gerry Smith, General Manager, Australian Government Joint NRM Team
- o Dr Jane Doolan, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria
- o Sarah Ryan, Chair ACT NRM Council
- o Simon Warner, CEO SE Catchments, QLD

1.2 Process

Prof. Paul Perkins commenced the discussions with a thought-provoking perspective on the opportunities and challenges ahead for Waterwatch.

The four other panel members then gave their perspectives (10 minutes each) on the 'focus' question:

What do you see are the specific contributions Waterwatch can make towards achieving sustainable NRM, given the emerging issues and changing landscape of NRM policy & practice?

The audience then moved into five break-out sessions to discuss the following questions, within the context of a chosen theme. The themes were: water crisis; climate change; structures and processes in regional NRM; and the growing focus on education for sustainability (two groups will share a theme).

- o What have we learnt that will help us move forward?
- o Are there barriers preventing us from going forward?
- o What do we need to do, or do differently, to move forward?

The last question was the key focus for the break-out sessions.

Each of the five groups was chaired by one member of the panel – their role was to promote discussion, ask probing questions of participants, etc. A facilitator (a state or regional Waterwatch facilitator or AG Rivercare facilitator) acted as scribe.



Waterwatch is supported by the Australian Government



2 BIG PICTURE (PAUL PERKINS)

2.1 What have we learnt that will help us move forward?

- o Use MERI more widely and directly at both national and state levels and seek to incorporate Waterwatch into local performance stories.
- o Promotion of Waterwatch to all stakeholders
- o Embed and link Waterwatch with local government activities.
- o Embed Waterwatch into specific regional NRM grants
- o Identify the monitoring requirements of an NRM body.

2.2 What are the barriers preventing us from going forward?

- o Lack of community understanding of value in the big picture of Waterwatch data; community to lobby decision makers
- o Need positive messages to counter gloom associated with perceptions about climate change scenarios.
- o Lack of sufficient equipment
- o Inappropriate development scale and location
- o Staff turnover; loss of corporate knowledge
- o Profile of Waterwatch needs 'lift' even within host organisation.

2.3 What do we need to do to move forward?

- o Link with BoM as possible partner or host?
- o Present data in a way (use local media more) that community and decision makers can understand
- o Use open databases on websites (care with interpretation)
- o Use other people eg students and local heroes to tell the story
- o Exercise care in setting up monitoring plans
- o Use positive action messages with younger students
- o Shared responsibilities

- o Build new-style partnerships
- o Bigger better NRM coalitions
- o Define Waterwatch and its boundaries and relationships

3 CLIMATE CHANGE (JANE DOOLAN)

3.1 What have we learnt?

- o Networking/Supporting each other.

3.2 What are the Barriers

- o Overwhelm at change (scale).
- o Complexity of context.
- o Where does guidance on climate change issues come from? What is our role?
- o Negativity of problems/messages.
- o How can we tackle the climate change issue?
- o Stigma of community date.
- o Perception of Regional Board of Waterwatch as 'education'.
- o Understanding change management processes.
- o Balance between ownership and independence.

3.3 What we can do

- o Networking/support.
- o Communicate messages of conference to gain support.
- o Keep community/coordinators informed.
- o Thinking/seeking broader information.
- o Incorporating into planning.
- o CSIRO reports on climate change at a Regional level –
 - o Discuss Waterwatch role in regional bodies.
- o Contribute to regional 'report cards' in date.
- o Engage and inform regional bodies on the full potential of Waterwatch.
- o Collate the case studies/stories/best practice EGs to communicate Waterwatch.

- o Part of Waterwatch coordinators role is influencing upwards (need to build confidence to do this).
- o Building support structures at regional level (Steering Committee etc) to access and engage Boards/decision makers.
- o Engage in different sections of the community (decision makers).
- o Get your own spokespeople into positions of influence.
- o Make climate change local.
- o Fill monitoring gaps.
- o Monitoring in survival mode – help communities understand:
 - o Waterwatch flexible enough to pick up this monitoring role quickly;
 - o also communicate in schools programme;
 - o produce picture of how river has changed using your data.
- o Keep messages on climate change positive.

4 STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES IN REGIONAL NRM (GERRY SMITH)

4.1 What we have Learned from the Past?

- o Raised awareness of the program and what it delivers.
- o Waterwatch has broadened its perspectives and through involvement of indigenous people.
- o For sustainability Waterwatch activities need to link to projects, programs and funding streams.
- o Waterwatch needs to link to the MER strategies
- o Link Waterwatch to policy to achieve its goals. For example, Water Plans.
- o Waterwatch results need to be included within Departmental Report Cards.
- o There needs to be a balance of responsibility – “it’s up to them” (coordinators) does not strategically position Waterwatch within organisations.

- o A simple database and a way to manage would assist in communicating and acting upon information.

4.2 What we Need to Do?

- o Database with public access
- o Raise awareness of the outputs that Waterwatch can achieve.
- o Appropriate language for involvement - Australian Government Vs Landholders Vs Government agencies.
- o Link Waterwatch to MER strategies.
- o Evidence of changing behaviour that is measurable, proven and believed.
- o Need to tell the whole story – detailed version and a shorter version.
- o Need more staff and facilities.

4.3 What are the Barriers?

- o Waterwatch does not have any way of becoming part of the process and therefore it limits integration opportunities within programs.
- o Relying on volunteer hours to save dollars.
- o No career path in Waterwatch – entry level staff and short term contracts.
- o Lack of Waterwatch identity and branding.
- o Changing Goals of NRM
 - o Funding delays and receipt of funding
 - o Reporting on achievements (program logic)
 - o Application process for funding.
 - o Government emphasis changes and the capacity of Waterwatch to adapt to the changing priorities.
 - o Data – perceptions of data quality.
 - o Integration with priority programs and activities
 - o The lower importance on education

5 STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES IN REGIONAL NRM (SARAH RYAN)

5.1 What have we learned to help us move forward?

- o Data has not always been used by NRM Boards
- o We know very little about more remote sites
- o Data is not often strongly integrated into state and regional government bodies

5.2 What are the barriers to moving forward?

- o NRM boards communicate very generally
- o NRM Boards do not know enough about what WW does
- o Short term contracts lead to short term planning
- o Regions are sometimes large and unwieldy
 - o Subregions needed?
- o Lack of impact in data
- o Government bureaucracy

5.3 What can be do/do differently to move forward?

- o Build more effective relationships, education and communication networks with:
 - o Scientific bodies
 - o Community
 - o NRM Boards
 - o NGOs
- o Waterway specific reporting
- o Link to, & work within state/regional H2O management plans and report in their timelines
- o Increase capacity building in all communities
- o Incorporate indigenous values and knowledge
- o Develop Climate Change Action Plans
- o Promote data as engagement tool & scientific tool
- o Report up and down on value of engagement

- o Social surveys
- o Identify and target gaps in coverage

- o Expand scope to include:
 - o Refuge monitoring
 - Short timeline
 - o Riparian assessment
 - o Ground water quality monitoring
 - o Photo point monitoring
- o Scientific data planning
- o Statistical analysis
 - o High level of QA/QC
 - o Strong objectives
- o Create/develop monitoring plans
- o Stakeholders set priorities & objectives

6 WATER CRISIS (SIMON WARNER)

What do we need to do, or do differently, to move forward?

The new government, is a new opportunity.

Sell value of data to local government; regional bodies; other stakeholders. It needs to be much more than 'just' water testing. Data must have an end-use; be of value to stakeholders. Interpret the data for end user interests – use it to tell a story.

Providing water quality information to local government is a significant opportunity that Waterwatch has not utilised enough. Local government make many decisions which affect the health of waterways. This will lead to increased funding avenues for Waterwatch.

Influence people by informing, rather than advocating. If Waterwatch groups take an advocacy or lobbying approach towards other local stakeholders, such as local government, these stakeholders will probably feel the need to distance themselves rather than work in partnership. Therefore, focus on providing these stakeholders with useful information and knowledge (not just 'data') for NRM decision-making.

Show what Waterwatch can do to demonstrate our value. Community data has value, but quality data is important, we need to sell the

value of it to scientists and the people who will use it, e.g. local governments who may be making decisions on development proposals.

We need to continue to build and communicate the quality assurance of our data. There are many scientific sceptics with vested interests in de-crediting Waterwatch data, so we need to try hard to prove them wrong.

We have a good product: We need to sell it better (to all stakeholders), and; translate the data (interpret) to the users requirements.

We need to design programs better so that data can be interpreted. They need to be designed in consultation with potential end users.

Draw good stories together, especially at a national level. "Success breeds success" – others become interested.

Embed Waterwatch in important structures, e.g. Regional NRM bodies. It's also important to embed the process of partnerships including Regional Bodies, local government, to fund Waterwatch.

Be aware of your primary purpose (don't try to do too many things) – and sell it!

We should continue to provide data for free – not charge a cost to create a funding avenue. This is against the partnership ethos of Waterwatch. We won't need to do this if we collect and communicate data/information of interest to potential funding bodies.

(On the role of education) Often decision-makers don't understand what is happening in schools (they assume because they went to school they know about it)...we need to 'educate' them (Roy Hallam). Education needs to be more than 'just' schools (Simon Warner).

7 SUMMARY SESSION

7.1 Discussion-Group Summaries

Sarah Ryan

- o Partnerships – demonstrate the importance of, and how Waterwatch helps build partnerships
- o NRM coalition – show value in what we do

- o Redefine relationships
- o Positive messages are needed
- o Present data that community and decision-makers understand
- o Long-term funding needed – build relationships
- o Need a challenge

Paul Perkins

- o Importance of MER – developed for regional, state, national scales
- o Need for 'stories' – make a difference – holistic story – outputs/behaviour change... how long did it take...
- o Show off:
 - o Show the value – for investment/engagement (community and government)
- o Sharp
 - o Planning embedded and aligned in NRM body- specific objectives
 - o Run small, opportunistic programs
- o Strengthen
 - o Capacity including indigenous community
 - o Quality of data – collection and analysis

Jane Doolan

- o Bring topics to the community in a non-threatening way on climate change
- o WW can build pictures and understanding of ecosystems during 'wet', 'drought' and recovery.
- o Report card of monitoring (SEQ)
- o Build support base
- o Waterwatch and climate change:
 - o Communications area – get information out in a non threatening and educational way
 - o Link into CSIRO's predictions paper (due out in March 2008)
- o Waterwatch:

- o Offer networks
- o Focus on refuges and build a picture of how rivers change during the drought
- o Look at the southern Queensland model (Simon Warner, CEO SE Catchments, Qld)
- o Be strategic, attach yourself to an independent group or regional body, make somebody responsible and accountable for you. Report to them regularly on data, over time they will appreciate the value of Waterwatch.
- o Foster partnerships at national level
- o BOM 'water info' is a sleeping elephant for Waterwatch
- o Set some SMART Targets: e.g.
 - o Within 1 year, 30% of NRM bodies will have Waterwatch programs embedded
 - o Within 2 years, 50% of NRM bodies will have Waterwatch programs embedded
 - o Within 3 years, 100% of NRM bodies will have Waterwatch programs embedded.

Simon Warner

- o Influence Govt: process of influence in a strategic way – sell message upward – provide data and data usefulness to regional bodies and local govt. and data confidence
- o Influence people – inform government of 'stories' and 'sell' WW
- o Embed WW in structures – understand what regional organisations need – community needs to drive the process.

7.2 Notes from Final Whole-group Discussion Session

- o National Waterwatch Facilitator (NWF): needs to be more embedded at the national level
- o NWF – reporting, to Australian Government
- o Embed Waterwatch into AuSSI
- o Waterwatch has specific and local relevance: we need to make it national
- o International partnerships
- o Don't silo – share learnings
- o Need someone to take responsibility
 - o ownership of NWF position
 - o performance review
- o Enable learning through experience
- o National forum – builds capacity of state-level coordinators