



CRC for
Water Sensitive Cities



Program A: Society | Project A3.3 | Project duration: July 2012 - June 2015

Strategies for influencing the political dynamics of decision-making

Overview

Achieving water sensitive cities (WSC) is a mammoth task; they are difficult to define, and the issues are complex and often involve many players and decision-makers in industry and government. Politicians, policy-makers and business leaders play a vital role in enabling a successful transition to WSC in the long term, but they often have limited understanding of the principles. Equally, scientists and other researchers, and practitioners may struggle with limited knowledge of the political arena and how to navigate and influence the political decision-making process successfully and to inform public opinion effectively.

This project is designed to address the question of how the voices of researchers, experts and practitioners might be better heard and positioned in the policy-making process; particularly in evidence-based decision-making processes. The long-term goal is to develop the capacity of the CRC for Water Sensitive Cities (CRCWSC) to interact more effectively with policy- and decision-makers at all levels to ultimately influence the development of new policies that will help achieve water sensitive cities.

Key outcomes

This project is designed to build the capacity of researchers and develop strategies for influencing the political policy- and decision-making that work toward achieving water sensitive cities. The project aims to:

- identify current perspectives and attitudes of senior decision-makers (politicians, policy-makers and water executives) on evidence-based policy-making integrating research findings and scientific advice
- identify how policy-makers and political leaders make decisions and develop policies that affect the implementation of water sensitive cities
- identify how policy- and decision-makers can engage more effectively with, and harness the knowledge of, researchers, experts and practitioners
- generate models for decision-making that will assist key decision-makers in policy analysis and development
- build capacity of researchers, experts and practitioners to better understand the policy-making process and to ensure that their expert advice is being considered
- develop strategies for researchers, experts and practitioners to engage more effectively with the public, community stakeholders and decision-makers to influence policy-making.

Early insights into a case study on water policy reform

One case study exploring water policy reform in Australia has unearthed some of the tensions and often differing agendas of science and politics and the fundamental problems in connecting the two spheres. The case study, informed by interviews with 30 key players and a comprehensive documentary analysis, produced the following early findings:

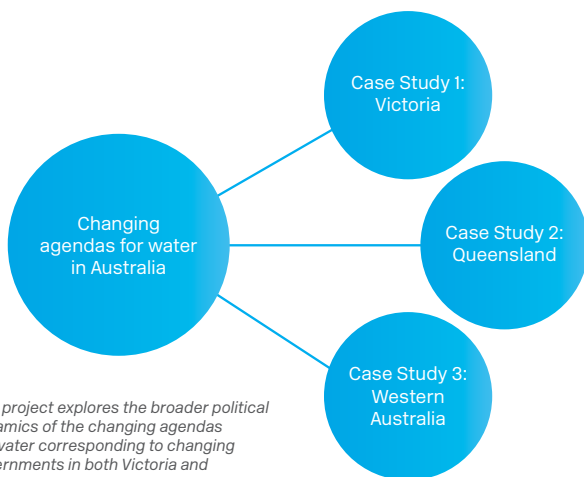
- Researchers who are highly attuned to political messages and think strategically both in the way they develop a political case for science and communicate their agenda seem to be most influential in the policy-making process. Researchers need to be able to articulate clearly what policy outcomes they want to achieve and then craft messages in a way that aligns with the objectives of government and policy-makers.
- Due to constrained and constricted timeframes, researchers often struggle with packaging and presenting scientific information in such a way that it will have an effective impact on policy- and decision-making.
- Timing is also critical because "policy windows" or periods in which there is significant political and government commitment to policy change, are infrequent and brief in the water policy area. Researchers need to be better prepared for these windows and provide input quickly and collaboratively when they appear.
- Researcher networks and credibility play a critical role in influencing political decision-making. Researchers and their associations need to build stronger networks with policy- and decision-makers and better maintain those networks.
- Often just a handful of scientists are consistently approached for advice and interpretation of scientific information in the policy-making process. Researchers need to build their capacity in engaging and communicating with policy advisors and political decision-makers for a broader base of scientific voices to be heard. Researchers also need to identify who the trusted voices are and collaborate with them. Only a small selection of scientists may ever get direct access to policy-makers.



Project design

Policy- and decision-making processes, especially those intended to achieve significant change, come with a number of inherent dilemmas: they are often highly complex, tend to be bound by their history and need to engage different agencies and players with often differing interests, preconceptions and agendas. There is also a heightened expectation to engage the community in the policy development process.

This research project explores water decision-making processes in Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia in three case studies. Up to a 100 interviews with five target groups including ministers, policy advisers, researchers, practitioners and implementers inform and underpin this research.



This project explores the broader political dynamics of the changing agendas for water corresponding to changing governments in both Victoria and Queensland.

decision-makers
messaging
engagement
practitioners
political case
strategies
credibility
advice
policy-makers
influence
WSC principles
capacity building
researchers
opportunities
communication
experts

Outlook

By June 2015, two more case studies in Queensland and Western Australia will be developed and the findings published. On a practical level, this project will deliver a number of tangible outputs such as:

- manuals and training modules to help scientists and practitioners communicate WSC principles and latest research findings more effectively to decision-makers, and for them to assist in building capacity in evidence-based decision-making
- a set of recommendations of sophisticated governance structures and processes that link science and expert advice to policy-making more effectively
- models and tools to inform and improve policy- and decision-making
- leadership forums and training for senior decision-makers that build awareness of the benefits of WSC and the importance of implementing supporting policies.

In the long term, it is envisioned that this research will build scientists' and practitioners' capacities to communicate their findings and to influence policy-making with greater impact; to generate WSC related decisions that are better informed and based on evidence; and to better inform public opinion and foster community engagement that will build long-term support for change.



About the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities

The Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities (CRCWSC) brings together interdisciplinary research expertise and thought-leadership from Australia and the world to address current urban water management challenges facing our cities and regions. In collaboration with over 80 research, government and industry partners, it develops and synthesises knowledge into powerful tools and influences key players aiming to achieve sustainable, resilient and liveable water sensitive cities.

Further information

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