
Stakeholder Analysis of Coastal Zone and Waterway Stakeholders in the Port Curtis and Fitzroy Catchments of Central Queensland

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This project used stakeholder analysis to investigate the values, interests, attitudes and aspirations of those involved in, or affected by, natural resource management decision-making in the Port Curtis and Fitzroy catchments. It was based on the premise that the resolution of environmental conflict is difficult in the absence of good understanding among stakeholders of who else is involved in, or affected by, their own actions and decisions. Understanding the basis for such social conflict, and cohesion, is essential in progressing cooperative catchment-wide decision-making.

The research was undertaken in the adjacent Fitzroy and Port Curtis catchments of Central Queensland. Although the two catchments are linked by the flow of water in the near coastal zone and share a common air shed these catchments differ dramatically in a social and economic sense. With the Fitzroy being a large agricultural catchment dominated by cattle grazing with a population base of about 114,500 people, and Port Curtis being an expanding industrial centre supporting approximately 43,000 people.

Use of stakeholder analysis and social mapping

The research progressed through three phases involving scoping, stakeholder analysis and social mapping. Face-to-face interviewing and document analysis identified stakeholders' key values and aspirations regarding the coastal zone, and their experience of natural resource management decision-making. To show the relationships between stakeholders, a series of 'social maps' were constructed showing convergences and differences regarding key values and aspirations. Stakeholders from the Fitzroy and Port Curtis catchments of Central Queensland were involved and participants ranged from the Director/President/Manager level to individual rural landholders and resource users (e.g. commercial and recreational fishers).

Values and aspirations

Fitzroy stakeholders focused their discussion of values on activities on and adjacent to the river more so than on beach and reef areas. The three main values expressed were water quality, function (or use) value and sustainability. Other values included ecosystem components or uses such as fisheries, mangroves, seagrass, wetlands, fauna and flora, river flows, and social values including recreation, cultural aspects and aesthetics.



The majority of Fitzroy stakeholders expressed broad aspirations for the attainment of zero impact and improved planning, with the goal of achieving a healthier or 'sustained' environment. The lack of specific goals and timeframes in this regard is likely to create significant challenges for planning and the development of a shared vision.

Port Curtis stakeholders valued water quality, preserving natural systems and habitats, fisheries, sustainability, mangroves, wetlands and seagrass. Stakeholders also viewed it as important to protect and maintain a multi-use landscape in Port Curtis that protected functional values such as the deep safe harbour. Social values encompassed coastal zone amenity and aesthetics, along with human health through good air quality and economic viability.

The four strongest aspirations expressed for the future of Port Curtis included: impact management for zero impact; strategic approach and better planning; maintaining the current environment; and extension of management activities. As in the Fitzroy, broadly defined aspirations for a 'healthy' environment and 'sustainable' development suggest further discussion among stakeholders is required to operationalise these goals at local and regional scales.

Coastal zone issues

The most common ecological issues mentioned for the coastal zone of the Fitzroy Catchment were: water use, sedimentation and siltation, habitat and resource degradation, water quality and water flows. In the Port Curtis Catchment the main ecological issues were identified as: water quality, habitat and resource degradation, and air quality. The water quality issue encompassed a large number of problems including sedimentation and siltation, chemical use by industry and water use for human consumption.

In both Port Curtis and the Fitzroy, population growth and human health impacts were the most frequently mentioned social issues associated with natural resource management. The protection of aesthetics and cultural aspects were also of high value. Industry viability, water treatment cost and the cost of environmentally friendly practice were raised as economic issues.

Coastal zone conflict

Most conflict in the Fitzroy and Port Curtis Catchments had at least some relationship with the multi-objective nature of demand for coastal resources. Key issues included:

- *resource access and rights*: related to rights of ownership or access to a resource;
- *attribution of responsibility for resource degradation*: particularly related to off-site impacts of resource use that was believed to reduce the quality of a resource for downstream users;
- *private versus public uses of coastal resources*: including loss of public access to foreshore areas to private ownership; and
- *governance*: including concern over centralised planning by institutions, the lack of a single management authority or forum for collaborative planning, and deficient legislation.

Decision-making processes were seen to reflect a narrow range of elite interests, offer limited opportunities for participation or capacity building outside these elite, and to pay insufficient attention to social interactions and issues, and the impacts of changes in resource use and condition.

Social, economic and political aspects underpinning coastal zone conflict

Social aspect – The failure of planning to link land use activities with spatial and temporal dimensions of impacts has implications for social equity. In particular, the social issues affecting Indigenous people and communities, who as ‘susceptible communities’ to resource change and coastal development frequently incur greater costs, while other stakeholders benefit.

Economic aspects – The most prominent economic issue centred on equity in water access and allocation. Negotiating equity in access and benefits from access to water use means that economic gains should be fairly distributed across the community and with some geographical equalisation.

Political aspects – The concern over political interference in decision-making was a prominent issue. Stakeholders’ distrust in government due to their influence and control in decision-making further fuels social conflict and the stakeholders’ sense of injustice.

Indigenous resource management

The study found only a limited number of coastal zone and waterways initiatives involving Indigenous people and communities. The main issues raised by Indigenous people in relation to coastal resource management included:

- deficiencies in representation and participation;
- lack of certainty in government processes;
- lack of recognition of cultural laws and protocols;
- determination of Indigenous cultural and land rights;
- protection of Indigenous cultural heritage; and
- the lack of resourcing for proactive engagement by Indigenous people.

Recommendations to improve coastal decision-making

Despite the commonality of values and aspirations shared by stakeholders at a general level (i.e. the desire for clean water, etc.), it is inevitable that individual stakeholders will, at least some of the time, have very different interests in the outcomes of coastal decision-making. In building institutional arrangements that facilitate the effective mediation of conflicting interests stakeholders identified a number of needs, including:

- a holistic approach to water management across local governments at a regional scale;
- an overarching planning framework, beyond local government planning and the *Integrated Planning Act*, to have better planning that delivers certainty of outcomes, a secure future and guides activities around a broad strategic plan;
- support and capacity building of umbrella organisations, which seek to be representative of all interests, sectors and communities;
- engaging and forming linkages with the urban community and Indigenous groups to identify opportunities to involve them without adding to their consultation demands; and
- more effective definition and management of coastal regions within the broader regional natural resource management plans.

In relation to Indigenous peoples, future efforts to strengthen involvement in resource management need to be directed towards:

- development and adoption of appropriate processes and protocols for Government and other stakeholders (researchers) to advance collaboration and the determination of Indigenous peoples' roles, responsibilities and rights;
- a two-way capacity building process with Indigenous people in areas of skills training, knowledge acquisition, awareness raising and facilitation; and with the integration of Indigenous ecological knowledge with western science; and
- development of an Indigenous governance framework to set out the appropriate institutional and legislative platform for Indigenous natural resource management.

Underlying these specific recommendations are several generic principles that participants believed were under-developed in existing arrangements. Those principles were:

- giving equal consideration to social issues and impacts alongside environmental and economic considerations in natural resource planning and management, and incorporating a wider range of social values including equity and justice alongside employment and economic development;
- addressing the cumulative impacts of multiple decisions and actions rather than considering each in isolation;
- taking calls for widespread participation seriously rather than treating it as a novel form of consultation over what is, in fact, centralised decision-making;
- including capacity building components in coastal management. This has two purposes: first, to ensure that marginalised groups, such as Indigenous people, are provided with more opportunities to participate in management forums; and second, to enhance understanding among other groups of the culture, knowledge, rights and potential contribution of those currently less involved; and
- adopting the precautionary principle and devoting more resources and effort to addressing knowledge and information gaps before major decisions are taken.