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Collaborative natural resource management in a changing institutional landscape : rhetoric and practice of catchment management in New South Wales, Australia

Pedro I. J. Fidelman

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**Collaborative Natural Resource Management
in a Changing Institutional Landscape:**

**Rhetoric and Practice of Catchment Management
in New South Wales, Australia**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

By

PEDRO I. J. FIDELMAN

BSc (Hons), MSc

School of Earth and Environmental Sciences

2006

Certification

I, Pedro I. J. Fidelman, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

.....

Pedro I. J. Fidelman

31 August 2006

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Acronyms

CaLM	Department of Land Conservation
CAP	Catchment Action Plan
CMA	Catchment Management Authority
CMB	Catchment Management Board
CMC	Catchment Management Committee
CMTs	Catchment Management Trusts
DIPNR	Department of Infrastructure Planning and Natural Resources
DLWC	Department of Land and Water Conservation
DNR	Department of Natural Resources
DUAP	Department of Urban Affairs and Planning
EPA	Environment Protection Authority
GDR	Great Dividing Range
IAD	Institutional Analysis and Development
NAP	National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality
NGOs	Non Government Organisations
NHT	National Heritage Trust
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
NRAC	Natural Resources Advisory Council
NRC	Natural Resources Commission
NRM	Natural Resource Management
NSW	New South Wales
RCCCs	Regional Catchments Coordinating Committees
SCMCC	State Catchment Management Coordinating Committee
TCM	Total Catchment Management

Abstract

Collaborative approaches to natural resource management (NRM), emphasising participatory and decentralised forms of decision-making, such as catchment management, have been experimented with in Australia over the past 15 years or so. These experiments have taken place in an institutional context that has been changing frequently and rapidly, as many states have, particularly in recent years, reviewed legislative and administrative arrangements for NRM. Such reforms may involve significant changes in the legislative and administrative arrangements, such as new and specific legislation, NRM entities with diverse names, structures and functions, as well as new processes.

In New South Wales (NSW), for instance, such changes have often altered the structure and process of NRM decision-making (e.g., the interests represented, the level of authority and power devolved, community participation, geographic domain, etc.).

Although, these reforms have sought to improve NRM performance and outcomes, they have occurred in a context where the exact requirements for institutional change, in order to facilitate collaborative NRM, are not well understood. In this context, it is not explicit how (and if) these institutional reforms are establishing, or are likely to establish, appropriate arrangements to translate the rhetoric of collaborative NRM into practice.

This research examined the design of and change in institutional arrangements for collaborative NRM in the context of the NSW experience. The study used a case study research approach to undertake a comparative analysis of the arrangements experimented with over the history of the NSW catchment management initiative (late 1980s-mid 00s). The Institutional Analysis and Development framework was used to examine three catchment management institutions, representatives of periods characterised by institutional change.

The research aimed to provide a better understanding of how (and why) institutional design and change have taken place, and how such design and change have facilitated (or otherwise) collaborative NRM.

The study showed that institutional arrangements, in terms of who participate in NRM decision-making and how they are selected, authority, powers and resources devolved, decision-making and aggregation arrangements, arrangements for communication, interaction, reporting and monitoring, functional scope and geographic domain, varied considerably throughout the history of the NSW catchment management initiative.

Despite the variations, institutional arrangements were characterised by significant constraints and have been limited in facilitating collaborative NRM. In many cases, institutional change reinforced the constraints to collaborative processes, such as those associated with stakeholder and citizen engagement, levels of authority and power devolved, and autonomy and flexibility of catchment management institutions. The analysis also provided insights into the challenges and complexities surrounding the development and implementation of collaborative NRM. Another key issue demonstrated in this study was an emerging trend in terms of institutional arrangements in NSW, where the current arrangements have evolved away from a collaborative model towards one of deconcentration (i.e., administrative decentralisation). Given the complexities and challenges involving the development and implementation of collaborative NRM, the adequacy and appropriateness of indiscriminately pursuing collaborative approaches was considered.

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