

PROCEEDINGS OF THE AUSTRALIAN RANGELAND SOCIETY

19th BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

Official publication of The Australian Rangeland Society

Copyright and Photocopying

© The Australian Rangeland Society 2017. All rights reserved.

For non-personal use, no part of this item may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission of the Australian Rangeland Society and of the author (or the organisation they work or have worked for). Permission of the Australian Rangeland Society for photocopying of articles for non-personal use may be obtained from the Secretary who can be contacted at the email address, secretary@austrangesoc.com.au

For personal use, temporary copies necessary to browse this site on screen may be made and a single copy of an article may be downloaded or printed for research or personal use, but no changes are to be made to any of the material. This copyright notice is not to be removed from the front of the article.

All efforts have been made by the Australian Rangeland Society to contact the authors. If you believe your copyright has been breached please notify us immediately and we will remove the offending material from our website.

Form of Reference

The reference for this article should be in this general form:

Author family name, initials (year). Title. In: Proceedings of the 19th Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conference. Pages. (Australian Rangeland Society: Australia).

For example:

Bastin, G., Sparrow, A., Scarth, P., Gill, T., Barnetson, J. and Staben, G. (2015). Are we there yet? Tracking state and change in Australia's rangelands. In: 'Innovation in the Rangelands. Proceedings of the 18th Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conference, Alice Springs'. (Ed. M.H. Friedel) 5 pages. (Australian Rangeland Society: Parkside, SA).

Disclaimer

The Australian Rangeland Society and Editors cannot be held responsible for errors or any consequences arising from the use of information obtained in this article or in the Proceedings of the Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conferences. The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Australian Rangeland Society and Editors, neither does the publication of advertisements constitute any endorsement by the Australian Rangeland Society and Editors of the products.



The Australian Rangeland Society

Building Relationships Towards Sustainable Economic Development in the Fitzroy River Catchment

Grey Mackay

Rangelands NRM, PO Box 1868, Broome, WA 6725. greym@rangelandswa.com.au

Keywords: catchment management; indigenous livelihoods; rangeland communities; stewardship; sustainable livelihoods; collaboration

Abstract

Development is not a new word for the Fitzroy Catchment in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. However, it is currently the focus of an enormous level of interest and investment driven primarily by the State and Federal Governments development papers, with significant diversity and different agendas with respect to pastoral, environmental and indigenous groups.

Rangelands NRM is facilitating opportunities to make the most from these initiatives and ensure the programs follow a sustainable pathway that is grounded in best practice environmental stewardship, is respectful and inclusive with community, and pursues sustainable and appropriate economic developments. History has demonstrated that significant investment alone will not bring about sustainable change to the region. Only through an inclusive, triple-bottom-line approach will we see lasting positive change that is driven and supported by community.

Our approach is to use a networking → problem solving → coordinated program to assist stakeholders along a journey. We bring an openness to discuss the issues, without having the answers or driving the direction of discussions. Together, the group is developing a framework and facilitating the creation of a body who can navigate environment, social and economic needs. We are using a 'collective impact' strategy to seek shared commitment through understanding of a collective goal between participating stakeholders. This encourages the pooling of resources, tasks and objectives across multiple stakeholders to change the disposition of a complex system towards resilient, sustainable and hopefully flourishing outcomes.

Introduction

The Fitzroy Catchment is remote, with its people, it is a vast and very old and precious landscape. As with many communities around the rangelands, many of the people have lived there their entire lives and have a deep connection to the land (Cook 2010). The decision makers who drive investment and policy tend to live outside the region or if they operate locally, can often be quite transient. According to the people who live in the region, this creates a level of disconnect. Investment and policies tend to be short term under a political or project life cycle, they can involve big dollars and best intentions; however, they are predominantly output driven. Outputs driven by a disconnected and transient workforce, resulting in a boom bust cycle of investment.

Too many times we see large investments fall over after a couple of years where environment and cultural needs are simply approval tick boxes and community consultation reverts to an information transfer process. In these project cycles people or 'the community' are seen as a means to an end rather than a key part of the system that needs to be fully understood to make it all work. Words are used that seem to acknowledge the importance of engaging with community, however processes aren't put in place to properly address it. There are numerous instances of this - projects with their own objectives and while everyone is 'consulting' with the community, the community somehow find themselves outside of the system.

Achieving better outcomes through a co-ordinated approach

Rangelands NRM believes in a landscape scale approach and works to support people to look after their own country by providing opportunities for people to work together – developing networks and relationships, sharing knowledge, resources and co-ordinating activity as illustrated in Fig. 1.

Understanding where people are at is an important first step in this work. With some initiatives, such as the Dampier Peninsular Fire Working Group where different groups were brought together to resolve an agreed common issue - fire management - we could move straight to a problem solving coordinated model to enhance collaboration and discussion as shown below. The network was easily defined, we knew who needed to be involved, there were existing relationships (or Rangelands NRM was able to bridge relationships) and the problem was easily identified.

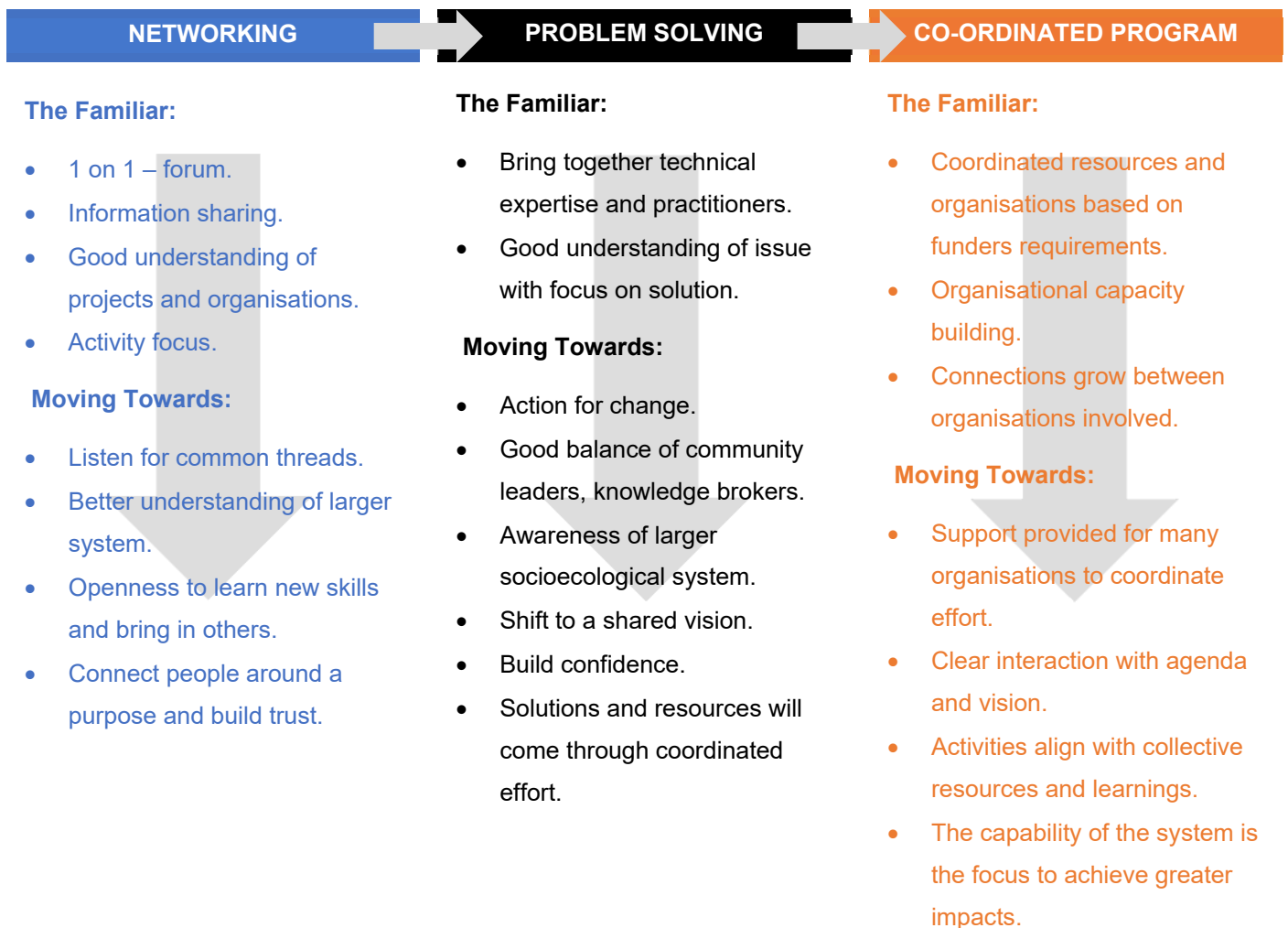


Fig. 1. Working through and within a 3 Step Framework

The Fitzroy Catchment provided a very different challenge. Not only do we have a mass of externally driven activity (Fig. 2), the local groups have very different world views and values and there is disconnection and mistrust locally and a disconnection from the decision-making focus in Perth (Hill *et al.* 2005; Preston 2017).



Fig. 2. Snapshot of NRM Stakeholders in the Fitzroy Catchment 2016. (Blue – Non-Govt. Organisation, Grey – Pastoral, Orange – Govt, Yellow – Research).

At the end of 2016, Rangelands NRM brought different stakeholders together to highlight the extent of what was happening in the Fitzroy Catchment and to explore if they wanted to work together. Then in March, we came together again to begin to set some goals. What came through strongly was that locals wanted to be more at the centre of these processes and they wanted a local voice. What was also evident was that the number of disparate voices and opinions was a challenge not only for stakeholders within, but also for new initiatives coming into the area (Preston 2017).

While often people seek to ‘get around’ the messy ‘people stuff’ to deliver their project or technical solution it was very evident that the ‘people stuff’ here was providing some real barriers to progress – for everyone. Ignoring this – and ploughing on regardless – was adding to the tensions and the mistrust within the community. Rangelands NRM saw that without real attention given to the complexity of the community/people issues there was no chance that a co-ordinated approach to delivery (such as seen on the Dampier Peninsula) would work. While there was pressure from stakeholders to get into the ‘doing’ side of things we recognised that moving too quickly was going to put us exactly back in the same position as we started.

Fitzroy - A Complex Space

The tool that really helped me to understand the complexity of the space we had entered into was the Cynefin model (Fig. 3). Once people enter the picture you quickly move from simple/complicated frameworks to a complex system. The Cynefin Framework has allowed us to understand how to work in this space. The learning for Rangelands NRM was really to be comfortable just playing in a complex space, to be comfortable with uncertainty and not narrowing in on any one outcome too soon. One of the most challenging things around complex systems is there is no one solution, it will continue to

morph so you continually have to probe-sense-respond to work out what happens next (i.e. if you insert one solution it will bring in other issues). You are working towards goals but they might also keep moving.

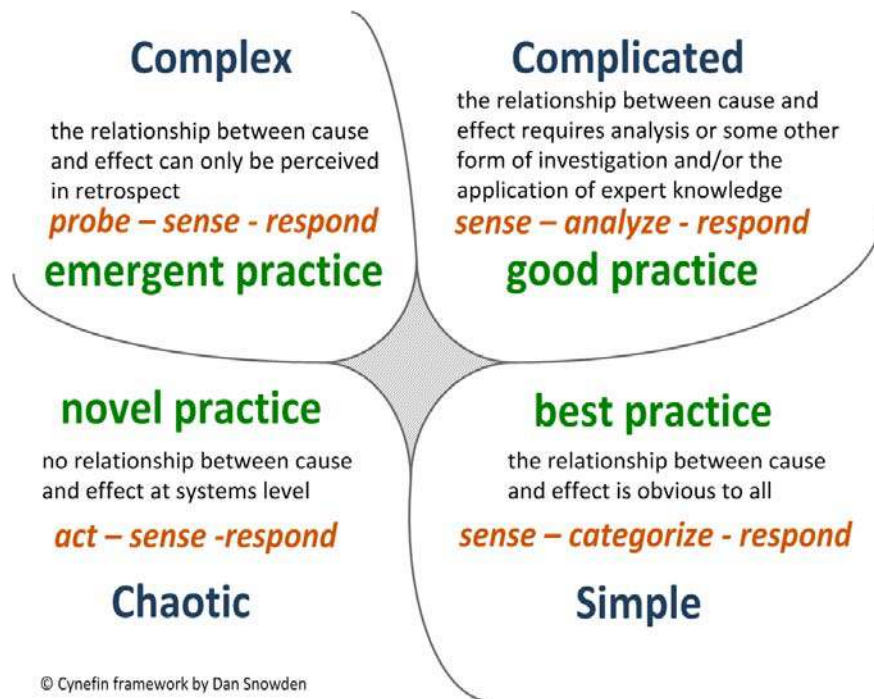


Fig. 3. Cynefin Model by Dan Snowden showing Complex System relationships (Snowden 2010).

We needed to allow time to engage and build trust, to discuss and articulate the issues, find common ground and support emerging leaders for change who were able to understand the larger system.

Working Better Together

Any initiative focused on ways to improve sustainable outcomes goes through a program life cycle (Preston 2017). Since there are pre-existing strategies within the Fitzroy Catchment regarding sustainability, Rangelands NRM is not re-inventing new project ideas, but examining the current state of how these complex social, economic and environmental systems are operating. This involves re-engagement with stakeholders with an aim to surface issues and possibilities around collective action. The intention is to move towards action strategies by finding “experiments” that could be small enough so they are safe to fail, and to develop and progress the ideas as the group develops and matures. This would involve refining, managing and governing models to sustain a collective impact outcome.

Another key aspect to Rangelands NRM approach was to ensure we received buy in and ownership from the policy and decision makers. Through aligning workshops in both Broome and Perth we aimed to provide an opportunity to build connection.

Conclusion

At Rangelands NRM, we recognise that a region’s greatest asset is its people. Through facilitating a process aimed at working better together in the Fitzroy Catchment we are looking at two outcomes. In the short term, Rangelands NRM is providing opportunities for better communication and cooperation through facilitating workshops. We are considerate of disparate views and objectives and we are aware of the disconnect between policy decision makers and regional communities.

In the longer term, we are working through the 3-step model for the bigger 'sustainable economic development' issue with the guidance of 'probe-sense-respond'. We are working in the 'networking' phase - ensuring in the first instance that we have a committed group of people, building relationships and processes that will be resilient through diverse issues and problems. This group can be a focal point for outsiders to come and find out who to talk to, a group that can build a picture of the different objectives of projects and what they mean for the region and the people and most importantly a group with local ownership.

References

- Cook, P. (2010). 'Fitzroy River Catchment Management Plan.' (The University of Western Australia - Centre of Excellence in Natural Resource Management: Perth.)
- Hill, R., Golson, K., Lowe, P., Mann, M., Hayes, S., and Blackwood, J. (2005). 'Kimberley Appropriate Economies Roundtable Forum Proceedings.' Convened 11-13 October 2005, Fitzroy Crossing, WA, by the Kimberley Land Council, Environs Kimberley and Australian Conservation Foundation. (Australian Conservation Foundation: Cairns.)
- Preston, N. (2017). 'Fitzroy Innovative Landscape Program – Report of Collective Impact Workshops.' Held Dec 2016 and March 2017 - Perth and Broome. (PsyOpus: West Leederville.)
- Snowden, D. (2010). 'Cynefin Model.' www.cognitive-edge.com. Accessed 20 July 2017.