



## **Going beyond the crisis response: building trust and maintaining legitimacy for all stakeholders in environmental flows and water governance**

Conveners: Dr Erin O'Donnell, Dr Avril Horne, Professor Brian Head FASSA and Professor Lee Godden FASSA

Going beyond crisis management: a workshop to develop new tools to build long-term legitimacy for environmental flows programs by bringing together researchers, practitioners and community organizations. This workshop will draw on multi-disciplinary research to identify a new set of tools and metrics to actively support participation and deep engagement, and build and maintain trust between stakeholders.

Good water governance is globally recognised as being critically dependent on efficacy and efficiency, as well as trust and engagement (e.g. OECD 2015). Water governance is often shaped by a top-down legal framework, but successful programs also require a high level of participation from a diverse range of stakeholders, over the long-term. This is especially true for environmental flows programs, which explicitly connect social and ecological values for healthy rivers and communities. There is an increasing need to more effectively build and maintain trust and engagement as part of implementing water law and policy, but so far, there have been limited opportunities for multi-disciplinary dialogue. This workshop will bring together researchers in social science, law, institutional economics, policy, social engagement with practitioners in water resource management to identify how the tools and research findings of social science can be applied more effectively in environmental flows programs.

This workshop will be a much needed and novel contribution to the challenge of implementing environmental flows programs in Australia, and will be of significant interest internationally. Australia is widely recognised as a world leader in water governance, particularly in environmental flows and water markets, but Australia has been less successful in maintaining the legitimacy of environmental flows programs over the long term (as demonstrated by the backlash to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan). Australia is also looking to expand water resource development to northern Australia, where building trust and engagement between government agencies and Indigenous Australians will be much more significant for the success of the environmental flows programs.

In 2007, the Brisbane Declaration established international consensus on the definition of environmental flows as:

“the quantity, timing, and quality of water flows required to sustain freshwater and estuarine ecosystems and the human livelihoods and well-being that depend on these ecosystems”.

The Brisbane Declaration committed to broadening stakeholder engagement, and building the networks and capacity required to implement, maintain and enforce environmental flows. Almost ten years on, environmental flow assessment methods are now cognisant of stakeholder participation and co-design, and recognise the dual role of environmental flows in supporting ecological and societal values, especially for those who rely on instream values to support their livelihood. However, environmental flows programs continue to be undertaken as technological ‘fixes’ for a specific problem, rather than recognizing that successful environmental management requires ongoing operation over a long period. Long-term operation requires a continued investment in building, and maintaining, legitimacy.

Measuring success for environmental flows programs has historically focused on two metrics: effectiveness, and efficiency. Did the environmental flows provided perform the ecological function that was required? And did it do so at a cost that was acceptable, and minimised where practicable? In debates about the *need* for environmental flows, these metrics were essential to the decision to provide water to the environment, especially when doing so meant that it was not provided to other consumptive uses. However, we are now starting to understand that legitimacy is just as crucial to the long-term success of environmental flows programs. Trust and engagement need to be built at the beginning, and maintained throughout the life of the program.

Environmental flows organizations, both government and NGO, are getting better at making these environmental flows management decisions transparent, but real legitimacy requires expanding the sphere of influence, so that local communities are invested in making the best decisions for environmental flows in their local context. By focusing on both *input* (the process) and *output* (the outcome) legitimacy, environmental flows policy makers and practitioners can embed legitimacy throughout the environmental flows management process.

This workshop builds on the forthcoming release of a new multi-disciplinary book, *Water for the Environment* (Elsevier, 2017, Horne et al eds), which centres legitimacy as a core metric for measuring the success of environmental flows programs. However, the building blocks of legitimacy (social engagement, consultation, communication, transparency and accountability) lie outside the usual disciplines associated with environmental flows (hydrology and ecology). The book highlights the need for a real dialogue between these diverse disciplines, and builds a consensus on the importance of the multi-disciplinary approach.

Building a real partnership between all the stakeholders in an environmental flows program, so that they are all invested in achieving a successful environmental water outcome, takes time, effort and humility. One often missing element is a specific

investment in building partnerships with indigenous peoples, particularly in the context of historical colonization and disenfranchisement. Legitimacy of an environmental water program will depend on giving all voices equal access, and accepting that there are many different forms of knowledge.

This workshop aims to take the next step in making legitimacy a core metric for success of environmental flows programs, by:

- Drawing on the latest social science research to identify new tools that can be applied to the problem of building trust and engagement in water governance and environmental flows, including how to report on levels of trust and engagement throughout a program;
- Building consensus in a multi-disciplinary field on the need to establish legitimacy as a core requirement for upfront investment;
- Identifying potential barriers to legitimacy, and lessons from the field; and
- Identifying new institutional arrangements that enhance legitimacy by supporting deep engagement and participation throughout the environmental flows program.

To achieve these aims, the workshop will bring together a core group of researchers and practitioners in environmental flows and related disciplines. The workshop will facilitate knowledge exchange between organizations and individuals from different backgrounds and locations by using a combination of formal presentation, chaired discussion sessions, and small group discussions.

The workshop will share the latest research on building trust and engagement, as well as specific tools that have been developed by social scientists and other academic disciplines. In addition, the workshop will draw on the expertise of the participants by using facilitated small group discussions to identify useful tools to build and maintain legitimacy, and potential barriers to the development and implementation of these new tools.

This workshop will build a network of researchers in social science, law and engineering, and practitioners in environmental flows that has an interest in supporting and building the concept of legitimacy into environmental water management programs.