

How to design and when to use collaborative processes: a Waikato example

(Notes from the panel discussion on the collaborative process for Healthy Rivers Wai Ora: Plan for Change, He Rautaki Whakapaipai)

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Context

The purpose of the Health Rivers Wai Ora project is to develop a plan change to the Waikato Regional Plan that address the health of the Waikato and Waipa rivers. Five river iwi have treaty settlement and/or co-management legislation relating to these rivers. This determines three things:

- i. *Process* – iwi are joint signatories at front and back ends of the process.
- ii. *Content* – the Plan must give effect to the Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River, deemed to be part of the Regional Policy Statement (RPS) and including objectives such as ‘the river shall suffer no further degradation’ and ‘be swimmable and fishable along its entire length’. Therefore the plan change is about pace and price.
- iii. *Structure* – in order to give effect to co-management, Waikato Regional Council and river iwi are putting in place joint decision-making structures at both governance and project levels.

➤ **Key point is that collaboration occurs under the umbrella of co-management**

Why collaborate...?

Because the Plan addresses socially complex environmental problems:

- Four main contaminants
- 1000's of mini catchments
- Highly complex on-farm practice change required
- High levels of voluntary compliance; high levels of variability in farm systems, soils, slopes, climate etc.
- 5000+ landowners; 10 hydro stations; significant forestry plantations and processing; 8 territorial authorities; significant new policy regimes in place for Lake Taupō and the allocation of water from the Waikato River

➤ **Key point is that collaboration is necessary to achieve behaviour change.**

From a social science perspective, a plan change has two tasks:

- i. To define the regulatory parameters
- ii. To prepare a community for change

How is Healthy Rivers Wai Ora collaborating?

We are using a mixed model of collaboration – building on lessons from the Land and Water Forum, Environment Canterbury Zone Plans, ecological experience in Nordic countries, the International Association of Public Participation, Twyford's and Horizons One Plan experiences.

Where are we at now?

We are putting together a collaborative stakeholder group (CSG) to oversee and guide the plan change. In order to address the vexed question of how to construct a CSG we ran an open process, via a one-day facilitated workshop. The purpose was to:

- Design the size, composition, skills and nomination process for a CSG
- Run a transparent, inclusive, efficient and confidence-building event for stakeholders

One hundred and thirty stakeholders attended the workshop in addition to 40 leadership representatives from the partner organisations (river iwi and the Waikato Regional Council).

Participatory methods were used to determine size, composition, skills, number of seats per sector and nomination process. The result is a suggested group size of 20, with representatives from across the sectors, and including four community seats. We are currently calling for nominations and using a mixed selection process. This includes nominations from stakeholder sectors as well as self-nominations from community representatives.

➤ **Key point is that we are using a mixed model of collaboration drawing on the expertise of public participation specialists, as well as experiences elsewhere in the country. Our governors often say that this is 'The Waikato' version of collaboration.**

What feedback did we receive about the multi-stakeholder workshop?

Feedback received from stakeholders was that it was a strong start. They were strongly positive on some of the fundamentals of project start-up (building understanding about the project; understanding who else has a stake in the process; putting the building blocks in place for the CSG in a transparent way).

Some of the feedback challenged us on:

- What is fair representation? For example, relative numbers of stakeholders from the economic versus environmental sector. In contrast others considered that the CSG should be predominantly those who have 'skin in the game', i.e. are directly affected
- How to retain a connection to the greater community? Many suggested repeating the large-group workshops
- The use of a nominal voting method for allocating the number of seats per sector, as compared to a deliberative process

- **Key point is that running a participatory large-group workshop is inclusive and transparent;** however, managing participatory methods in large groups is challenging and needs a level of deliberative process at the end of, or subsequent to, the workshop.

Capacity and capability – enhancing collaborative practice in large organisations

In the Waikato we sometimes talk about ‘Big C’ or ‘little c’ collaboration. I think it’s preferable to take an incremental approach to collaboration in large organisations.

Vivien Twyford talks about the importance of the ‘commitment to collaborate’ – it’s easy to say ‘let’s collaborate’ and much harder to do.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) focuses attention on the decision makers and the decision-making process before embarking on any public participation process.

Getting these first principles in place prior to embarking on a collaborative process is essential if an organisation is to deliver on a collaborative promise.

- **Key point is that river iwi and the Waikato Regional Council have focused on establishing the co-governance and co-management structures** prior to establishing the CSG. That way the CSG has clarity on the decision-making pathway for its recommendations.
- Details are on our website, and you are welcome to ring me to talk any of this through. <http://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/healthyivers> under ‘The process’.

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