

Tools for implementing freshwater reforms. (Panel discussion: collaborative processes)

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Overview presented at Freshwater Symposium: Tools for implementing the freshwater reforms, Wellington, organised by the Values, Monitoring & Outcomes research programme, funded by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.

We want to discuss two dimensions of our learning about collaborative processes in Canterbury:

1. The culture change required in the organisation (Environment Canterbury)
2. The challenges of shifting patterns of power and influence

Context

Collaborative process to develop CWMS and the zone committee structure where people (not stakeholders) from the local community, alongside council reps, collaborate to land a consensus about the pathways to deliver the CWMS targets out to 2040 within their area – make recommendations to councils and to other interested parties.

Powers and responsibilities of councils have not changed, but the regional council (commissioners) honours the community consensus that then drives both statutory and non-statutory activities. For instance, zone committee recommendations are reflected in the plans that are taken to the hearing commissioners for the statutory decision making.

1. The culture change collaboration requires of the organisation

We are much the same organisation – similar staff and expertise, same regulatory environment and accountabilities...

But collaboration has required a transformation of how we work, or our organisational culture.

We are delivering what the community wants – we are their advisors and supporters.

- Our purpose is to deliver the outcomes they want, rather than the ones we think are best for them.
- The community has expertise and knowledge that we need to do our job.

We have the same components, still linked to each other – but as an organisation we are relating to the external world and to each other in fundamentally different ways.

We would not minimise the challenge of that – we are used to operating in particular ways, relating to the community in particular ways, using our expertise in particular ways. We may

get our professional confidence from that – and now we have to continue to use our professional expertise, but in a different way!

2. The challenges of shifting patterns of power and influence

In the old order, it was easier to exert influence and power if one had:

- expertise in planning processes
- money (to pay lawyers, consultants etc.)
- staff who could prepare submissions, attend hearings, lobby
- links to national conversations and political opportunities
- willingness to be adversarial.

This has fundamentally changed:

- a) **The planning process is now fundamentally *shaped* by the pre-statutory community processes.** Influence/power of ‘what needs to happen and how’ now lies with the local community – people on the zone committees. They are:
 - locals (they have to have significant interests in the area),
 - not stakeholders.
- b) **Recommendations/decisions are made by consensus so one needs to take all interests with you** to effect change, not just be the loudest person in the room. Turning up when we get to the statutory process is to ‘miss the boat’.

This is a new situation for many of the traditional players, who:

- are used to deciding priorities and influencing things at a national level, and now have locals making decisions in particular catchments:

e.g. industry that did not engage with the community process to recommend river flows – missed chance to get an easy path through the re-consenting process;

e.g. national organisations:

- approaching commissioners to propose responses rather than engaging with the zone committee processes;
- turning up late in the sub-regional planning processes and trying establish a generic solution rather than a local one.

But the local collaborative process:

- gives locals power;
- is enabling those who care most about a particular area to find solutions that all can agree are the best we can do. Also building a huge amount of social and cultural capital for further discussions and decisions.