

Providing Flexibility in Land Management Policy: the case of the community weed model in Victoria

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Background

Incorporating local people and communities into natural resource management has become a global conservation and development orthodoxy. It has brought with it a rethinking of conservation, natural resource management and landscape protection, and, where it works well, has facilitated a more inclusive approach to searches for sustainable futures.

In assessing ways in which inclusive or participatory approaches have contributed to the goal of sustainability, policy makers and natural resource managers have tended to emphasise ecological and economic outcomes. Policy makers, for example, may use cost-benefit frameworks within which to assess policy options, whilst natural resource managers may define success in terms of biodiversity protection or ecosystem maintenance outcomes. However, there is more to conservation and natural resource management than these.

Participatory and more inclusive approaches to a range of sustainable development issues have a well-trodden path leading to both success and failure (see for example, Cooke and Kothari [eds] 2001; Hickey and Mohan [eds] 2004). This experience provides three important questions which are relevant to this paper:

- i. to what extent does bringing the ‘community’ or the ‘social dimension’ into conservation reflect inclusive outcomes?
- ii. to what extent does ‘the local’ get appropriated into dominant ideas about conservation and sustainability (and is this a good thing)?
- iii. once these questions are considered, what are the implications, both in terms of sustainability and actively-engaged communities, for approaches to sustainability that are founded on inclusive ideals, values and processes?

This paper explores these questions using an approach to weed management developed by the Department of Primary Industries, Victoria - the Cooperative Management of Invasive Pests approach (CoMIP).

Significant economic and ecological impacts occur with pest plant invasions on public and private lands. Historically, management of these invasions was seen to be predominantly a matter for government agencies concerned with agriculture and/or conservation/land management.

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However, the CoMIP approach has evolved in Victoria from a desire by communities and local areas to take increasing control of weed issues that are of greatest concern to them. Under this model local, regional and state-wide representative and inclusive groups work with government and industry to understand and work through the complexities of the weed problems they have identified.

The model builds on locally-based networks and structures to develop a strategy for coordinating and improving the management of target species. This strategy aligns

with the Victorian Pest Management Framework and other key Victorian policy statements as well as National strategies for the specific species.

The CoMIP approach requires three important components. Firstly, from an agency perspective, it requires a rethinking of weed and land management policy and practice to incorporate the flexibility in approach required to adapt to the specific needs of local areas. This often implies a renegotiated set of power relations between agency and community, particularly in the area of enforcement.

Secondly, this approach needs to incorporate support for capacity-building within communities. It is well known that community-based initiatives in a range of conservation and/or sustainable development approaches are doomed to failure if individual and community capacity-building are not supported.

Thirdly, from a community perspective, local actions and activities need to be supported and facilitated through locally-representative and inclusive institutions. The role of these local institutions in acting as a bridge between local landholders and Agencies is particularly important.

This paper explores the importance of these three components. It uses two case studies (the Northeast Blackberry Action Group - NEBAG) in northeast Victoria, and the Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party to show how these three components have influenced the delivery of a more cooperative and inclusive response to weed management and reflects on the lessons learned from this experience.

Conceptualising the approach: Rethinking weed and land management policy and practice

Community-engagement models potentially lead to outcomes which are partly about natural resource management and partly about community change (Furze *et al* 1996). These kinds of approaches, with their emphasis on inclusive and participatory approaches, require changes at a variety of levels. Community members need to be aware of changed policy environments and priorities and need to be able to actively engage with opportunities these approaches provide them. They also need to understand the nature of challenges found within the new policy environment and be reflexively able to meet and overcome them. Natural resource management agencies need to understand and adapt to different sets of roles and relationships both within agencies themselves as well as between agencies and local communities.

These are important aspects to community-engagement models as they are inherently about facilitating social, economic and cultural change. This in itself extends the role of agency workers to incorporate at least some aspects of outside change agency, and extends the roles of communities to being more actively engaged with change processes at a local level.

Some implications

There are obviously significant implications when enabling components are not integrated, or indeed are contradictory. Some concerns which come up again and again relate to the following:

1. the extent to which ‘community’ is seen in geographic terms rather than ‘local social system’ terms. This often leads to community involvement which is unrepresentational or a view that ‘it’s the same old faces’ at workshops etc. The question needs to be asked is why they are the same old faces and what can be done about it?
2. the extent to which an active civil society (or, more often, a civil society leading to environmental problems) is seen in psychological or economic terms rather than as a result of the ways in which people engage with their communities, the ways their values have been and are continually shaped by institutions such as the economy, family, the media and the role of historical forces in shaping contemporary Australia. We need to move our analysis away from the individual and more to the individual being located in a diverse socio-economic setting. It is this broader setting which needs to be the focus of analysis.
3. the extent to which time as well as space is in disharmony. If an enabling ecosystem context is operating on a timeline of decades whilst the policy framework is operating on four-yearly election cycles, then there are obviously problems (and an active civil society needs to be engaged in redefining the timeframe of the policy process). But it is not only this. Funding for research, natural resource management and indeed community engagement and the facilitation of an active civil society can all operate on different time frames. It is very difficult to engage a community, or facilitate an active civil society if funding is tied to three-to-five year outcomes.
4. the extent to which the economic imperative assumes community and civil society are underpinned by economic values only. Whilst there is no denying that economic outcomes are important, there is also no denying that we have concerns over above the economic, especially liberal economic outcomes. These urgently need to be factored into the ways in which the market is used to explain environmental problems and look for solutions.

The Community Weed Approach: towards a new process?

Background

All weeds may be equal, but some are more equal than others. Not only are weeds defined in terms of socio-economic, cultural and political processes, they are also historically underpinned by shifting views of usefulness, or lack of use.

By way of example, Patterson’s Curse *Echium plantagineum* was grown in a garden in the late 1880’s in Albury, New South Wales. Some 120 years later, conservative estimates suggest it covers over 30 million hectares of Australia and in 2002 cost the wool and meat industries \$125 million. It has reached a stage where the only sound option for government’s intervention is to invest in biological control of the plant, and recommend containment measures for land managers. Yet it also has another common name – Salvation Jane – highlighting that one person’s weed is another person’s salvation.

The Patterson's Curse 'horse has bolted' scenario is by no means unique. There are currently 125 noxious invasive pests declared under the Catchment and Land Protection Act which are too widespread for eradication. But policy has another dilemma. The established weeds, by definition, are well-known and occupy a high level of recognition and awareness in land manager popular consciousness, yet new and emerging weeds potentially pose a much bigger threat to agricultural landscapes in Victoria.

Increases in global travel and trade have translated into greater possible alien biological incursions into the Australian landscape. It is estimated that there are 40,000 potential weed species that could enter Australia, of which eight new weed species establish in Victoria annually (Weiss 2004). Recognising this potential threat has resulted in establishing a list of some 410 new and emerging weeds carrying a high risk of establishment for Victoria.

The policy space

Governments have an important role to play in the facilitation of sustainable futures. Consequently, understanding the policy process as well as its outcomes is crucial in assessing the extent of movements to integrating the other enabling components and indeed being integrated with them. However, it is not only the nation-state which is important. Both global and local conservation and development agendas are framed by, and also frame, policies and so the incorporation of these multi-levels is important.

An important aspect to consider in this is the extent to which policy is proactive and the extent it is reactive. Put a different way, enabling policies should not be the management *of* change but management *for* change. There is a fundamental difference in these two policy approaches, and they have significant implications for both the other enabling components and options for a sustainable Australia.

What the establishment of the list of priority weeds highlights is a policy dilemma, as well as a weed management dilemma. On the one hand, there are well-established weeds with high levels of community concern and with little chance of eradication. On the other, there are local, national and international socio-economic processes which are threatening the invasion of new weeds with potential to have significant environmental and economic impacts.

Recognising the better benefit/cost of prevention rather than trying to eradicate new weeds once they establish, the Victorian Government has prioritised the prevention and early intervention of new and emerging weeds. This shift in focus has been informed through the nationally recognised Noxious Weed Review, which assesses weeds based on their invasiveness (both present and potential) and their social, environmental, and economic impacts and cost/benefit ratio. The dilemma, of course, is that these are not necessarily the weeds local communities are concerned about, have experience with, or are trying to eradicate.

With this dilemma, there was an obvious policy space required – to look at another way of the state fulfilling responsibilities for weed management, especially with those 'community weeds' such as blackberry, gorse and serrated tussock. The Cooperative

Model for Invasive Plants (CoMIP) emerged out of this policy space as an alternative approach not only to weed management but also to state/community relationships.

The CoMIP Approach

As a result of the policy space being filled by both Government and communities, an opportunity for a reworked approach was feasible, one based more fully on cooperation and inclusivity. It is doubtful if this could have been achieved if the policy space was not filled by:

- Agency staff who were encouraging a community approach
- A policy shift prioritising new and emerging weeds but with a history of responsibility for established weeds
- Communities who had previously seen a range of Government services withdrawn and who were willing and able to be actively engaged in this process.

The CoMIP approach is a state-wide program that engages a network of regional stakeholders and community groups in a strategic and coordinated approach to managing three priority weeds – blackberry, gorse and serrated tussock. These groups have evolved differently due to the various social actors involved in their establishment and also the distribution and agency history of the weed.

The CoMIP approach has been designed to achieve:

- Community and stakeholder ownership of weed/pest issues leading to on ground management and actions
- Strong partnerships between communities and agencies
- Increased social cohesion and capacity of group members

Community Weed Groups developing a strategy, which they are responsible for implementing, to coordinate and improve the management of their priority species. This strategy must align to any relevant National strategies for that species, as well as the Victorian Pest Management Framework and other key Victorian policy statements. It is intended that each Community Weed Group and their strategy influence weed management on that particular species across the state.

The three community weed groups are the Serrated Tussock Working Party, the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce and the Gorse Taskforce. These groups all serve as a state-wide platform, in which regional and local groups are integrated.

The purpose of the three community weed working parties or taskforces is to provide coordination at the state-wide and a platform for the strategic management of the weeds. There is diversity in the operations, inclusion in decision making, and promotion of on-ground work in each of the weed groups.

The cases of the Serrated Tussock Working Party, having a strong region-level focus, and the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce, with localised experience, provide important comparisons between local and regional approaches.

Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party

The Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party was first established in 1995 when the community was deeply concerned with the spread of serrated tussock, a devastating

weed that has invaded 130,000ha in Victoria. In response to that community concern, a strategy for the control of serrated tussock in Victoria was produced. That strategy called for the development of the Victorian Serrated Tussock Society, now known as the Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party (VSTWP).

The VSTWP comprises eight community members, and representatives from the Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Catchment Management Authorities, Municipality Association and the Department of Primary Industries (research and policy). The position of chair is held by a community member, and the Executive Officer to the working party is provided by the DPI.

This group has led the management of the original strategy and continues to drive the goals of the current strategic document “Intensifying the Attack of Serrated Tussock – 2005/10”. The Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party’s vision is the future that could be achieved in Victoria through a partnership approach. The community now understands the impact of serrated tussock and expect action. Conservative estimates indicate \$11.8M - \$15.7M gross economic benefit t generated by the program from 1995–2002.

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce

The Victorian Blackberry Task Force (VBT) was originally formed in 2001 as a result of community support for blackberry control, however went into a period of abeyance after developing there 2001 strategy. The VBT re-formed in 2003 and is now the public face of a strategic approach to tackling the blackberry problem across the state.

The VBT comprises five community members from across Victoria, and representatives from DPI (research and policy), Department of Sustainability and Environment and Parks Victoria. The position of chair is held by a community member, and the Executive Officer to the taskforce is provided by the DPI.

The group is focussed on the implementation of the Victorian Blackberry Strategy (VBS). The VBS was published in 2001 and was managed by the VBT. Its vision is to ensure that blackberry is managed effectively to prevent further spread and reduce its current impact on all land in Victoria. The VBT’s new strategy, for the years 2008-2013, focuses on the wider community accepting responsibility for blackberry control and how communities can contribute to the on-going protection of social, environmental and economic assets, with no further increase in blackberry distribution in Victoria.

Challenges of a community weed model

The CoMIP approach has been a successful way of managing widespread weeds, providing multiple benefits to both communities and government alike. There have been associated challenges in the establishment and recognition of the approach within an agency context, as well as within communities. Inclusivity in weed management requires changes within agencies, within communities and within individual perceptions.

Developing local institutions and local approaches

Moves to inclusive approaches in natural resource management usually require new sets of formal and informal relationships between local people and government agencies, new institutions which reflect these relationships as well as the altered policy context, and flexibility in development and operation to avoid the 'one-size-fits-all' models of previous natural resource management approaches. The CoMIP approach is no exception. The Serrated Tussock CoMIP approach and the Blackberry CoMIP approach reflect commonalities and differences in programme development, operation and organisation.

Serrated Tussock Experiences

Serrated Tussock (*Nassella trichotoma*) is a proclaimed noxious weed in Victoria and has the potential to cause greater reductions in pasture carrying capacity than any other plant in Australia. Serrated tussock is a weed of national significance covering more than a million hectares in southern Australia.

In 1995, there were deep concerns within communities and landholders with the spread of serrated tussock. Public meetings were convened to address the problem, particularly the threats posed to grazing industries and native grasslands if it were allowed to spread unchecked. The Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party (VSTWP) emerged from these meetings.

The VSTWP is a representative group, with members representing the 22 Landcare groups operating within the Melbourne-Geelong-Ballarat infestation area. In partnership with the Department of Primary Industries the VSTWP's goal is to develop a strategic plan for controlling serrated tussock in Victoria. This group has led the management of the original strategy and continues to drive the goals of the current strategic document *Intensifying the Attack of Serrated tussock – 2005/10*.

The serrated tussock and natural resource management agenda shifted in the late 1990's from short-term options to an agenda of longer-term change and investment. This was essentially realised by the Working Party who believed there needed to be a strong emphasis on compliance if there were to be any inroads into reducing the impact of serrated tussock.

In serrated tussock areas, the Working Party and landcare groups have observed the reversal of traditional attitudes that oppose regulation of the use of rural land. Current community attitudes indicate that land-managers are prepared to accept a high degree of regulatory action to involve all the Serrated Tussock affected properties in a timely and co-ordinated program. This has been confirmed in the recent ST Survey 2001.

A key component is for extension officers and compliance staff to work with and provide landowners the opportunity to develop an agreed plan of action on broad acre, non-arable country, to prevent seed set and reduce infestations on an incremental basis, establishing long term control of serrated tussock on their properties. Time frames are negotiated between the Catchment Management Officer and the landowner. This process allows each landowner to be treated in a fair and reasonable manner.

The VSTWP has literally 'moved mountains' of serrated tussock, reducing it from 130,000 to 82,000 hectares of Victorian land. It is estimated that by 2025, the efforts

of the working party will have saved nearly \$16 million in control costs and loss of production.

The CoMIP approach with serrated tussock has resulted in the following:

- 40 per cent of infested properties were found to be serrated tussock free after on-ground efforts by the working party
- The number of heavily infested properties fell from 13.5 per cent to 3.4 per cent of landholdings between 1995 and 2002
- The working party has changed landowners' perceptions of weed control: more than 75 per cent now view serrated tussock control as a high priority; and 76 per cent feel they have let the community down if they fail to control the weed.
- Based on extensive mapping and recording processes the program has covered some 600,000ha involving 5, 784 landholders.
- The current estimation of 82,000ha infested has meant a reduction from the 1995 level of 130,000ha of 42,000ha, (37%) which is now under long term control.

Key lessons from the serrated tussock experience

Successful serrated tussock management should revolve around community engagement and inclusivity. However there is a dilemma. Serrated tussock infestation occur in locations with broad demographic difference. Broad-acre farms, hobby-farms at the urban fringe, land held for urban development are all locations with serrated tussock infestations. This has had impacts on the feasibility of locally-inclusive approaches. For example, it is not always easy to get representative 'community groups' when significant numbers of land managers represent what has been called 'rural suburbia' with its hobby-farms and urban-based professional owners. It is a significant challenge for the VSTWP to integrate these varied demographics into an inclusive approach. As a result, currently the use of enforcement as a tool is essential to ensure management of infestations. Whilst this may not necessarily reflect an ultimate outcome for the group, currently it is a necessary option until local institutions are able to be more fully reflective of local demographics and until local land managers become more fully aware of the importance of the management of serrated tussock.

There was, and continues to remain, a critical need to increase community understanding of the economic and environmental ramifications of serrated tussock to ensure all land managers were aware and shared common objectives. This was also important for other groups and institutions involved, including, for example, the Department of Justice. Whilst tied to the issue of compliance (for better or worse, a reality discussed above), the court system tended to treat serrated tussock cases as minor cases. Awareness of the impact of this weed on the broader community was undertaken.

The Working Party strongly encourage local governments to seek opportunities to work with the rural community to ensure that Federal, State and local catchment programs which we are left to implement are based on realistic and long-term positive

benefits for our rural and regional communities. The Working Party believes local government is placed at the forefront of delivering on outcomes on serrated tussock. They are placed at the coalface between landholders and the tiers of governments.

The program is delivering significant results in their objective to reduce the impact of serrated tussock in this state. Farm enterprise change from grazing to cropping, increased awareness, technical advances in control methodology and large scale landscape change processes involving forestry regimes are starting to deliver the desired outcomes.

The Blackberry experience: a community group emerges

The relationships between civil society and social capital are importance for sustainable futures (Furze and Reid 2008; Hyland 1997). For us, civil society is the scene of people's values, beliefs, actions and aspirations. It is related to, but not the same as, community. An active civil society promotes engagement with values which underpin sustainability, and which underpin equitable outcomes. It is about people expressing their creativity in resolving environmental problems and about groups of people improving their capacities for self-management, monitoring and evaluation.

It is different to the notion of 'social capital' especially as it is currently used in the popular jargon of policy making. Social capital is much more narrowly defined and tied into 'community' as geographic location, whereas the idea of an active civil society is much more tied into people's capacities to participate in decisions that affect their futures, participate in the management of changes and indeed identify appropriate futures and change mechanisms (given the policies, support and the facilitations of skills to do so).

The North East Blackberry Action Group - Upper Murray (NEBAGUM) was formed in February 2005 as a result of community desire to address the impacts of blackberry infestations on agricultural productivity and biodiversity in north east Victoria. The Upper Murray is home to some of the most pristine natural regions of Victoria, and also is the birthplace of the Murray River. However, much of the private and public land has large infestations of blackberry.

Initially, members of the local Landcare network were to solicit State government to provide pest management officer support to the region to enforce government legislation with landholders with problem blackberry infestations. This was met with resistance, as State-government policy reflected their new focus on new and emerging weeds, with less resources being available for investment into established weeds, such as blackberry.

This resulted in the dilemma mentioned earlier. For private land managers in the Upper Murray, the visible threats blackberry. The new and emerging weeds are not perceived as a threat because they are not visible in the landscape, and not considered to have an impact on farm profitability or landscape values. A perception of 'lazy bureaucrats' having no interest in the issues on the ground was reinforced.

Because of the policy space encouraging community-action through the CoMIP approach, encouragement was given by DPI for the area to establish an institution for

locally managing blackberry. However, at that point of time, there were no examples of collective community involvement in blackberry management.

A pivotal point in the group's establishment and success was not treating the case as a lost cause. Blackberry was locally-identified as a significant issue in terms of lost productivity, landscape values and biodiversity conservation – it was seen as an economic, issue (lost productivity), a socio-cultural issue (lost landscape values) and an ecological issue (lost biodiversity). Even without government support, blackberry still remained an important multi-dimensional issue within the community.

After a series of informal discussions, it was decided to call a meeting of stakeholders – Landcare representatives, public land managers, local government representatives, the plantation industry and Vicroads. After identifying the need for the establishment of a group to manage blackberry, a facilitator was used to help draft a basic action plan. This process consolidated the vision of the group, and also allowed a reality check in the form of recognition that blackberry will never be eradicated from the region, but it could be managed.

Funding was then sought through various state and local government avenues. Funding was made more attractive due to the collective nature of the group, with government being able to justify expenditure around policy for supporting community led action in pest management. In addition to the collective nature of the group, the energy of group members combined with a somewhat loosely organised structure has much stronger lobbying powers in State Government.

The group have managed to attract funding from various sources, which have gone towards funding an outside project officer who is employed a few weeks a year to map and develop landholder contracts with land managers. This structure has also meant greater effort via public land managers to coordinate their weed control activities with the groups.

Today, NEBAG has success in the management of blackberry and their strong on-ground focus has ensured growing respect from those land managers not directly involved in the group. Blackberry is still an issue within the region, but the group has provided a platform to seek alternative funding to address other land management issues. One particular project which has gained success has been the establishment and re-generation of native species in areas previously inhabited by blackberry.

Discussion: towards a new approach

Changing the concept of natural resource management: reflections on agency practice

Natural resource management can represent an orthodox approach to conservation and the management of nature. The historical development of much knowledge which underpins it can be seen as the application of technico-scientific solutions to problems which have, in the past, often been defined in technico-scientific terms. Now the social dimension is to be incorporated, coming from a very different knowledge base and a very different set of theoretical and conceptual assumptions.

The facilitation of sustainable futures requires a model of natural resource management incorporating an awareness of the complex relationship between conservation and socio-economic development agendas. Further, it requires an understanding of the assumptions within various natural resource management orthodoxies and the effects these have on people, communities, conservation and economic development. It is not only a matter of bringing people into the natural resource management orthodoxy, but critically reflecting on these orthodoxies, questioning the extent to which the very concept of natural resource management needs to be rebuilt, in what ways it should be rebuilt, and who should be involved in the rebuilding. Obviously this needs to occur by recognising the ways in which the other enabling components influence natural resource management.

The move to greater inclusivity in weed management had its detractors. For landholders, weeds were often seen as a government responsibility, especially in areas where there are significant tracts of public land. For some agency staff, landholders were best dealt with by focusing on compliance.

Changing the concept of weed management required adjustments within Government agencies, and with the professional roles of agency staff.

From an agency perspective, the development of more inclusive approaches resulted in:

- The formation of new networks of regional stakeholders and community groups capable of successfully responding to and acting on a range of species
- New generations of land managers who are capable of dealing with the challenges of the new approach, as well as the challenges of weed management.
- Collective action on invasive pest plant species through the development of community–agency partnerships. These partnerships would lead to better coordination in established invasive pest plant species management, which will pave the way for ongoing communication and opportunities for all to work together to address invasive pest plant species problems.
- Enhancement of current integrated invasive pest plant species management efforts through the establishment of Community led invasive pest plant species groups for priority invasive pest plant species.
- Ownership of widespread declared lower priority species by CMAs to actively integrate invasive pest management into their programs.
- A community engagement and empowerment program focusing on invasive pest plant species that can be expanded into other States.
- The engagement and involvement of local government, land management agencies and community groups in the implementation of innovative invasive pest plant species management programs.
- The development and dissemination of extension support material for community partners and local governments participating in the Community Invasive pest plant species Model program.

Capacity-building issues in communities and agencies

The need for capacity-building in altered rural landscapes has been well documented (see, for example, Macadam *et al* 2004). Building self-sustaining, community based pest management systems is possibly the most challenging community capacity building principle within the CoMIP approach. This is particularly important for weed

management because the scale of the weed problem for established species is large and the risks are persistent. There is a need to build capacities successive generations of new landholders, developers and managers about this issue. This requires long-term commitment to, and support of, community weed group capacity building strategies to assist with the appropriate development and implementation of their weed strategies.

Embedding community engagement in government landscape protection programs and service planning is central to:

- developing a practical vision at both regional and statewide levels
- achieving stronger and more productive community partnerships
- ensuring a local and regional focus to weed management planning
- providing the opportunity to identify and address local solutions
- improving effectiveness and integration of weed management programs.

A critical factor in engaging communities in agency program and service planning is to ensure the outcomes of the engagement process are linked to the agency's approval and decision-making processes. Asking community for their input on an issue where decision-makers are not committed to change, or have already made a decision can be more harmful than not involving community at all. This is a significant issue, and moves the process away from a purely consultative one to one focused on participation and inclusivity. It also recognises the changed relationships of decision-making, control and power/influence that such a process brings.

Equally important is the timing of an engagement process. Engagement around programs and services should occur when the community has the best chance of influencing decisions, and community should be given enough time to express their views and to receive feedback on any outcomes.

Another critical factor is clearly identifying and defining the approval and decision making process. The role of Ministers, local Members of Parliament, executive and senior management should be clarified so the relevant players can be fully briefed about the engagement process, any arising issues and the outcomes of engagement.

Transparency and accountability in the engagement process and an understanding of how the outcomes will inform decision making are also vital. This requires clarity about the level of influence community involved in program or service engagement processes will have on the final decision.

Community Pest Management groups who believe they can genuinely influence the outcomes of an engagement process are more likely to dedicate their time and energy to becoming involved. However there is a very high risk that the government-community partnership will dissolve "overnight" if

- there is any abuse of a community's trust by agencies
- if weed management by community becomes, or is seen to be, a cost shifting exercise

- weed management group decisions are not supported by agencies (within the broad policy frameworks established)

The role of the executive officer

The Executive Officer plays unconventional role, balancing between representing the Department and its associated polices whilst also advocating on behalf of the community. As suggested earlier, identifying both a civil society and the community's capacity to undertake a community weed approach to management is essential.

When presenting the community weed model approach to potential communities, the governmental policy shift towards managing new and emerging weeds is first established. This is important in scene setting with potential partners, and can serve to establish trust as agendas are laid bare. The approach, as used by the NEBAG, is then outlined to its members, told as a narrative of one's community approach to managing blackberry. A facilitated discussion often results in community members raising questions about their context, be it environmental, social, differing values, and so forth, and the application of this model to their circumstances.

Once again, in establishing trust and transparency for the process, the EO must assure community that it is an approach. Rather than offering potential solutions to the group, the EO, if applicable could retell another communities story in dealing with a process, or alternatively re-frame the question back to the group. In the more active, or civil society based groups, this results in a dialogue towards alternative futures for the community to embark down, whilst also allows for the surfacing of more serious social issues towards blackberry management in regions, for example, the absentee landholder who visits once a year and has wild blackberry farm. This process begins to direct discussion towards action rather than finger pointing. However, it is important to note, that there are often community groups who hear the approach to blackberry management and resign due to the effort required, or possible lack of interest of blackberry as a serious problem in their landscape.

The relationship of the EO as an outsider may be defined as a facilitator, offering both technical aspects to blackberry management, but more importantly, facilitating development processes within a defined community. However, it is imperative that if community interest is demonstrated, that the EO continue to follow up on these new relationships, maintaining and re-establishing levels of trust between community and government.

Challenges for the future

Whilst there is little doubt the CoMIP approach represents a significant improvement in the management of weeds and potentially provides a process beyond just weeds, there are a number of challenges.

The issue of compliance

A significant tension can exist related to compliance. If compliance is the ultimate 'big stick' which can and does get used to force land managers to undertake weed management, the CoMIP approach has the potential to take a different position. As community groups are established and become institutionalised locally, pressure for weed management moves from coming from legislation, law and agency staff to

communities, neighbours or project managers. This shift in areas of responsibility, senses of responsibility and local pressure has occurred with generally positive results.

However, as discussed earlier, locations with diverse socio-economic characteristics as well as a variety of levels of awareness of responsibilities and issues mean that compliance remains a mechanism which is used. As a result, some tensions exist occasionally between the responsibilities of agencies in their land management roles and those responsibilities devolved to community groups.

Two examples of this are useful. Compliance checking in a location may be at odds with the capacity-building being undertaken through the CoMIP approach. As a result, for community members, one part of the agency is encouraging greater local control and responsibility, whilst another part of the agency is threatening legal action against individual landholders. Secondly, community-groups may be taking increasing control of weed management, yet they are faced with how to handle land holders who do not take responsibility for managing their weeds. Whilst the community group is encouraging inclusivity and transparency, it will have to make significant decisions relating to those land managers who are not responding to this. Do they ignore it and hope the local pressure from other community members is enough to change attitudes and actions? Or do they look to the agency for compliance?

The problematic nature of 'community'

Community is a somewhat problematic term and is used in a number of different ways. It gets used as a geographic location (for example, the spot on the map that is Adelaide), given an environmental definition (for example, the 'communities of the upper Murray need this water'), a national significance (the Australian community), a set of associations (a religious community) and, in the sociological view, a local set of social relationships which extends beyond the geographic location or environmental context.

The latter, sociological, definition opens the door to an understanding of the ways people live their lives in a geographic location and in a particular environment and, importantly the significance of this to them. Further, by understanding community as a local set of social relationships, it also allows us to move away from a romanticised notion of community to look at issues of power and influence, winners and losers and local agenda setting. In short, it gets us into the life of people's relationships with each other and their natural environment. The community, as location of people's lives and the scene of their participation, is thus an important dimension to change and an important enabling component for sustainable futures (Furze *et al* 1997).

There are always potential areas of risk with the formation of such groups is the ability to re-enforce or establish new unequal power structures within regional and rural communities. From the NEBAG experience, this has been resolved through strong community leadership, clear governance, and trying to establish high levels of inclusiveness across the region with other committed community members.

Longevity and burnout

Community burnout can become a serious issue when facilitating community driven programs, particularly within rural communities who have had negative experiences with the Landcare model. If the Landcare model is viewed by communities as moving away from meaningful engagement, towards a structure of political control and agenda setting (Lockie and Vanclay 2006), communities and their social actors are disenfranchised. The challenge for policy-making, for agency staff and for communities themselves will be to ensure the policy space that supports community action remains. As highlighted previously, ensuring individuals have decision making power within the process is essential to maintain empowerment.

Another issue with longevity and burnout relates to the social actors themselves. Community action requires people to be part of change, which raises the issue of who is involved (Norgaard 2007). Social action may be influenced by factors such as gender, class, age etc and it is important that the policy space is provided for meaningful engagement and change. However, it is also a challenge for local groups to become representative and inclusive and not just dependent on ‘the same faces’.

Conclusions

The CoMIP approach provides great potential for inclusivity in pest management. This, however, will be dependent on the policy space remaining which supports and encourages this process. It will also be dependent on agency staff adapting to, and supporting, its aims and ideals. Of course, if CoMIP is to reach its potential, it will also require local communities to be involved, engaged and committed.

All this requires policy frameworks which reflect these ideals, capacity-building within agencies and communities, and recognition by the various actors of the principles, philosophies and ethics which provide the foundation of the CoMIP approach. If this is achieved, it is likely the CoMIP approach will continually evolve and adapt, providing an important vehicle for inclusivity in the management of a variety of pest species, not just weeds.

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