Engaged Government: A study of government-community engagement for regional outcomes

Report 1: Project Overview

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Abstract.

The devolution of government business to regional government/community partnerships, coupled with the call for greater policy coherence, is challenging all levels of government and communities to collaborate in new ways to deliver regional outcomes. There is little empirical research to guide public managers in determining best value arrangements and strategic investments for building a region's 'collaborative advantage'. This project will examine the conditions (strategic, structural and procedural) under which multi-sectoral collaboration can deliver policy coherence and positive regional outcomes and identify the costs, benefits, trade-offs and capacities associated with effective multi-sectoral collaboration.

Case studies for the project are being sourced in the central Queensland region. The project is being designed to explore some theoretical issues as well as a series of practical considerations about engagement processes. Key methodologies will be drawn from the political science, sociology and economics disciplines, and an action research framework will be adopted to maximise the value of project outcomes and engagement with industry partners. This report outlines the broad context in which the studies will be undertaken.

1. Introduction

The process of government is continually undergoing subtle changes in Australia, as the interplay of several themes takes place. As the Australian economy grows and specialises, and as society becomes more complex, government tends to play increasing roles in terms of providing services, setting the institutional structures, planning, and providing a welfare net. At the same time, there are pressures for government to become more streamlined and efficient, and part of the institutional and microeconomic reform process in Australia has been concentrated on this particular issue.

At the community level, expectations about government roles are often mixed. On the one hand, many people expect increasing levels of service from governments, and call for government to become involved in a broader range of issues. At the same time, many people are confused by the complexity of government processes, and find different layers of government difficult to deal with. There are more calls for government to communicate better with communities, and to closely involve stakeholders in decision making processes. However, such involvement can increase the layers of decision making and requires additional funding and time commitments.

At the regional level, governments often find it difficult to lead development issues or allocate resources where some members or sectors of the community are left at a disadvantage. As well, one level of response to increased globalisation pressures and exposure to competition are demands from regional communities for more support and interaction with government. To be able to gain effective change, governments are concentrating more on long-term engagement with communities so that broad support can be garnered for resource development, protection and allocation issues well in advance. However, there is varying capacity in many communities to engage with government effectively, so some communities need additional support before they are able to engage effectively with government.

While governments try to be reasonably uniform in administration, consultation and engagement processes, substantial differences emerge in the way that governments engage at the regional and community level. This is because of differences in the makeup of communities, differences between communities in their capacity to embrace change, and varying levels of funding available. These factors and the process of innovation means that different communities are trialling different engagement processes. These variations in the levels and types of interaction between communities and government raise questions about what are the most appropriate types of interactions, and whether there are consistent lessons to be drawn across different levels of government, different communities, and different sectors and government functions.

Some examples help to illustrate the variety of approaches being trialled by government to address these various engagement and governance issues. Some mechanisms focus on addressing the issues through better processes within government, paying attention to procedural issues, coordination between government agencies, and engagement with communities. One example of this approach would be a Regional Managers' Coordination Network to coordinate various government functions. In contrast, other mechanisms focus on providing services outside of government. Examples of this approach include the devolution of funding and responsibility to independent catchment and natural resource planning groups, such as the Fitzroy Basin Association or the Murray-Darling Basin Committee. As well, the development of more market-like approaches to many issues sees the responsibility for some functions being transferred out of government into private markets. Examples of this approach include public-private partnerships to build public infrastructure.

A different way of addressing engagement, governance and regional planning issues is to establish

detailed regional plans with community input to act as 'blueprints' for future development and service delivery. In this way the coordination issues occur 'up front', creating a template for various government agencies and communities to follow. Examples of this approach to engagement and governance issues include regional planning processes such as the Central Queensland: A New Millennium project run in central Queensland.

To identify which forms of engagement are most appropriate and beneficial to communities, it is convenient to consider questions about engagement in three main ways. The first involves the economic issues, where questions about appropriateness can be asked at two levels. At one level the relevant issues revolve around whether different types of engagement are more efficient at generating economic growth (particularly at the regional level), and allocating resources in ways that meet community needs. (These needs might include issues such as employment levels and wealth distribution.) At another level, the questions are about which forms of engagement are most efficient at delivering a set outcome, and might involve some analysis of the various costs and benefits of engagement processes.

The second main way to consider engagement is in terms of the social impacts. Engagement processes represent different ways in which people coalesce to develop their interests, and can be very important in terms of building community and regional identity. Determining how engagement processes contributes to community development and ultimately to social capital helps to provide some measure of the returns available. At a more micro-level, an understanding of how personal interactions build engagement processes provides a mechanism for evaluating which engagement processes are more successful than others.

The third main way to consider engagement is in political science terms. Here the focus is on how communities and sectors pursue their own self-interests, and how institutional arrangements contribute to, or inhibit, effective engagement. At a micro level, a political science analysis can reveal how engagement processes work, and identify the best ways of structuring engagement processes to lead to community development and efficient government.

These approaches to analysing engaged government are being explored in a research project focused on government and community relations in Queensland, Australia. The project is funded under the Australian Research Council Linkage Grant program and is supported by Queensland Government Departments of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy, Main Roads and Queensland Transport, the Local Government Association of Queensland, Griffith University, Central Queensland University and The University of Queensland. A primary purpose of the Linkage Grant program is to support University-industry partnerships to acquire new knowledge through research and development projects, which involve risk and innovation.

The project will utilize an action research approach involving researchers and public managers and practitioners in knowledge building around an institutional development/reform agenda. The proposed project is unique in bringing together a multi-disciplinary research team capable of investigating complex matters of governance, public sector management, regional economics and planning, sustainable development and community engagement.

The purpose of the Engaged Government Project (EGP) is to develop a better understanding of trends and drivers in engagement processes, identify outcomes and net benefits of engagement, assess how successful engagement varies by factors such as sector and issue, and to consider which types of engagement appear to be most beneficial in delivering outcomes at the regional level. In doing so, there are two broad aims being pursued in the EGP. These are to:

(a)   Assess the conditions under which multi-sectoral collaboration (across levels and areas of government and between government and community) at the regional strategic planning level enhances regional policy management; and

(b)   Inform the development of strategies for improving regional governing capacity and performance.

This report is the first in a series on the EGP, and is structured in the following way. In the next section, the background to the project is outlined, together with a summary of some of the key issues and the research and development challenges in a Queensland context. Different perspectives on the research questions are outlined in Section three, followed by an overview of methodological issues in Section four. Some conclusions are presented in the final section.

2. Background

Government processes are typically complex because of the variety of roles and responsibilities that government plays. In Australia, where government is layered at Commonwealth, State and local government levels, major issues of efficiency and coordination arise. To achieve efficiency, government administration is normally broken into a number of discrete units (departments, units, semi-autonomous bodies) that are focused on particular areas. This raises issues of coordination, both within and between levels of government, particularly when there are areas of overlap in responsibility.

There is a constant interplay of coordination and efficiency issues within government as the result of new technology and knowledge developing, changing economic and social conditions, changing government roles, and the interplay with political factors and budget constraints. This means that there is no single solution to efficiency and coordination problems, and that there is normally a fluid flux of efficiency and coordination initiatives within governments in Australia at any one time.

In recent times, there has been a number of additional themes developed in Australia that overlay this evolving flux of how governments go about their business operations. One of the major preoccupations of Australian governments since the 1980s has been that of national economic efficiency. At one level, this has focused government on setting and leading the micro-economic reform agenda. For example, through privatisation and corporatisation, governments have retreated from some functional areas. They have also worked more closely with the private sector (such as in public-private partnerships). At another level, there has been more focus on governments becoming more efficient, with calls for restraints on government spending, more justification for programs, and moves towards a smaller public sector. While the continued calls for governments to expand their roles in a number of areas make it difficult to shrink the public sector in either absolute or relative terms, one outcome is that governments are under continued pressure to be efficient.

Another key theme that impacts on government operations are increased calls for coordination within and between government to be improved. In part, this reflects a changing society where people are much more mobile and focused on service provision, and trade in goods and services continues to develop. For mobility and trade to be seamless, it is important that government functions be consistent across a range of services. Boundary changes are taking place within the institution of government with the 'call for joined-up government' (Rhodes, 2000, p. 155). While this is often achieved by centralising government functions, (or locating relevant functions within

single government agencies), it is more difficult when government has to operate on a regional basis across different levels.

A third key theme that can be identified is that of the increasing calls for devolution of government business to the region or 'place'. This is against broader centralist tendencies. Government functions have tended to become more centralised within Australia for two main reasons. The first is that economic and population growth has concentrated in major centres as Australia has become more urbanised. The second reason is that a focus on efficiency and coordination has favoured centralist models over more devolved models. Against this have been calls from regional areas (at both political and governance levels) for governments to be accessible and relevant to them. This means that there is constant pressure on governments to engage with, and be relevant to, regional communities.

At the same time, there is increased recognition that regional development cannot simply be generated by allocating government expenditure in regions or focusing on major projects. The work in 'new regionalism' emphasises sustainable regional development through integrated planning, interagency initiatives, expanded public processes, nurturance of social capital and regional advocacy and provides a strong argument for collaborative relationships as a critical expression of regional governance arrangements (Gray and Lawrence, 2001; Wheeler, 2002).

A fourth theme that is emerging is increased focus on community involvement with government. One facet of this are enhanced opportunities for local government to work with other levels of government to gain strategic reach for local issues (Wallis and Dollery, 2002). Changes are occurring also in relationships between government and civil society as citizens are afforded a greater role in shaping and implementing policy and a range of opportunities to engage with government decision-makers (Edwards, 2002; Davis and Keating, 2000).

Some of these additional goals for government are being termed 'joined up government'. Pollitt (2003) identifies four broad managerial goals for joined up government, which include: more effective policy through the elimination of contradictions and tensions between policies; achieving more efficient use of resources through the elimination of duplication and/or contradiction between different programmes; innovation and more effective approaches by improving the flow of good ideas and co-operation between different stakeholders; and more integrated or 'seamless' sets of services through a 'one stop shop' approach to public services (p. 35). A number of these goals also describe governments' rationales for seeking stronger links with their citizens and communities of interest. To capture the notions of community engagement and regionalism in addition to the coordination functions of joined up government, the term 'engaged government' will be used.

There are a number of key benefits that are expected to flow from an engaged government process. These include

- better services to community and business,

- reduced costs for communities and business to engage with the government,

- improved development and planning in regional areas,

- improved relations and cooperation between governments and communities,

- increased development of social capital in regional areas,

- greater stability in planning and engagement processes,

- increased efficiencies (including the avoidance of duplication) in government activities,

- increased 'ownership' of local problems by regional communities,

- the potential move to 'triple bottom line' planning (sustainable regional development) at the regional level.

At the same time, engaged government processes are also expected to incur some costs. Increased coordination, engagement and regionalisation are likely to involve a range of direct and indirect costs for both governments and communities. For example, increased engagement with communities might involve substantially higher time and travel commitments from community members, while greater coordination might involve substantial internal effort and cost for government agencies. Public funding may be allocated to independent regional groups for NRM and other purposes, while planning and coordination may involve substantial internal costs for government.

A key issue is that there is little evidence to support assertions of enhanced policy and service outcomes for communities and efficiencies for public administration through engaged government approaches. As well, there has been little work done to identify and assess the costs of these processes, so that evaluations of the net benefits can be made. Further, the processes of collaboration and engagement are fraught with problems related to legitimacy, accountability and capacity and high transaction costs. As Pollitt (2003) highlights, shifts towards 'joining up' agendas have a political as well as managerial dimension. In the same way, community engagement often involves institutional and political changes, creating other impediments to successful engagement.

To be able to assess the likelihood that engaged government processes are generating overall benefits to regional communities, several preliminary steps need to be undertaken in terms of definition, description and understanding. A major issue is that while there substantial interest and activities with engagement processes from community groups through to government agencies, there is no definition on what an engaged government process entails. In the description above, engaged government has been defined as some combination of three key themes:

- 'Joined up government' – some degree of interface between government agencies to present a uniform or seamless service to communities, but which may also extend to coordinated planning for future community needs,

- Community engagement – some degree of community involvement in decision making and planning, and,

- Regionalism – some fostering of regional development, and perhaps development of regional governance and self-reliance.

There are many potential combinations of these elements to form engaged governance processes, and it is likely that what is defined as engaged government will very both across regions and within regions. This makes problems of definition a key focus for research work.

Because engaged government processes are real world phenomena rather than theoretical abstracts, it is possible to describe what is taking place in terms of these processes. There are a number of regional case studies available where the governance process could be described as engaged government (using the three key themes identified above). Examples range from the establishment of natural resource management (NRM) bodies in Queensland to better address environmental sustainability issues, to cooperative planning between government agencies and communities for

future development and infrastructure provision. Describing what is happening in engaged government is a key stage to aid with both the definitional and understanding issues.

Figure 1. Key Function of Engaged Government.
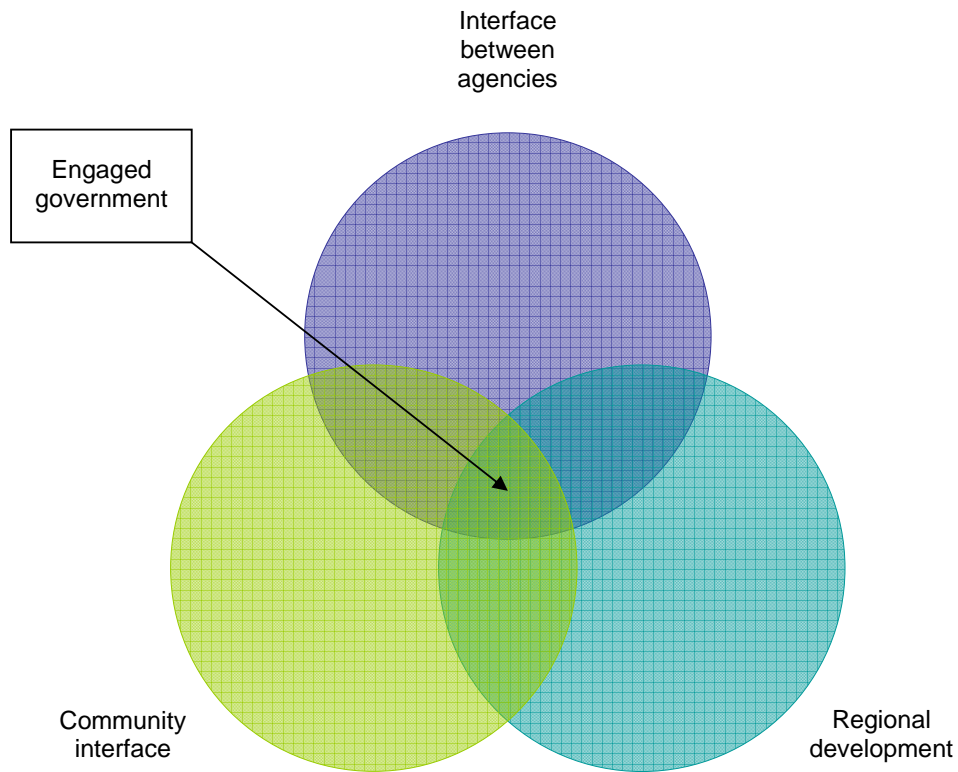
A key step in the evaluation of engaged government processes is to be able to understand what the processes are, how they are working, and what the key drivers are. It is likely that engaged government processes are dynamic, a function of networks and personal relationships within regions, and influenced or driven by regional, institutional, economic and political factors. Understanding how engaged government processes are working, identifying the key factors and drivers that make an engaged government process successful, and identifying the critical factors that can be thought of as 'best practice' are crucial prerequisites to an evaluation process.

2.1 Issues around joined up approaches

A snapshot of some of the issues that are relevant to the engaged government process is outlined below.

- Institutional dilemmas

  Standing coordinating mechanisms are one mechanism used to ensure that agencies coordinate planning and services. Examples of coordinating mechanisms include:

  - Regional Managers' Coordination Network (coordination between state government agencies)

  - Central Queensland Local Government Association (coordination between local government authorities)

  - Fitzroy Basin Association Board (coordination between various stakeholders involved in natural resource management).

  Although standing coordinating mechanisms may encourage more focus on longer term objectives, it is unclear how well these mechanisms work, and how effective they are at generating cooperation and synergies between agencies. At a broader level, the relevant question is how well the different functions of government can be aligned and provided, where some functions may be located within agencies, some outside of agencies, and others across agencies. Governments often reallocate functions between agencies in order to develop different synergies and efficiencies, illustrating that cooperation between agencies is not the only mechanism available to achieve better service outcomes.

  One difficulty with standing coordinating mechanisms is that these may become very fixed and unresponsive to changing community and governance needs. Another problem is that the membership may be appropriate to each of the issues brought forward. For these reasons there is developing use of more flexible, time-limited partnerships to address specific governance and development issues.

  Many joined up approaches to localised policy problems take the form of 'area-based' partnerships, which tend to be project-specific and resourced for a limited period of time. These initiatives do not coincide always with existing administrative boundaries and, thus, cut across existing authority arrangements, programming and project priorities. Perhaps for these reasons, many of these initiatives have limited influence in sustaining the coordination of government agencies around local priorities (see Mant, 2002; Rhodes, 2000).

  Another institutional dilemma that is emerging involves the introduction of different institutions and the potential for competing and overlapping systems of governance. Examples of these are occurring in natural resource management, where the Commonwealth Government is funding natural resource management bodies (such as the Fitzroy Basin Association) to be responsible for resource management at a regional level. The creation of a new layer of resource management governance creates interesting jurisdiction and operating issues for state government agencies, local government and these NRM groups. It also raises questions about whether new systems of community engagement and governance could be applied to other key areas of government function such as health, education and transport.

- The capability dilemma

Collaboration in a complex field of interests and resources is problematic for most sectors and actors within a regional system. The skills base in a local or regional area is often limited. For example, local councillors demonstrate an uneven capacity for strategic and local advocacy work, networking, participation in multi-organisational partnerships, and community building (Wallis and Dollery, 2002; Martin, 1997). Barriers to inter-agency collaboration are well documented in a

number of government and consultancy reports (e.g. UK's 2000 'Wiring it Up', New Zealand's 2001 'Review of the Centre' and IPAA's 2002 'Working Together – Integrated Governance') and studies of 'area-based' initiatives (Mant, 2002; Walsh, 2001).

Issues around communities' capacity for collaboration are no less problematic. For example, communities differ in their ability to work on broad policy agendas over the long term and undertake community building (Warren, 1998). Further, different community structures (such as corporatised versus advocacy groups) differ in the capacity of their accountability systems and the level of trust and confidence they engender in their communities (Cebulla, 2000).

A different issue is that a focus on collaboration will sometimes make it more difficult for agencies to provide specialised services. This might occur when agencies are expected to develop broader, overlapping briefs in an effort to provide seamless community services. The creation of separate agencies is justified in that it is more efficient to provide specialised services and to provide clear demarcations in responsibility. (Similar efficiencies and gains from specialisation and trade also govern the development of private firms). It follows that in an engaged government process, there are still substantial efficiency benefits from having agencies concentrate in core areas and having a unique set of responsibilities. It is likely that the benefits of an engaged government process are not in moving away from these core specialisations, but in finding better ways for agencies and communities to coordinate and plan for service delivery.

- The appropriateness/complexity dilemma

One issue relates to who are selected to be part of governance systems. There is evidence that mainstreaming particular community structures for ongoing collaboration offers efficiencies and builds strategic capacity but may raise concerns about capture versus inclusiveness and the representativeness of non-elected community members (Raco and Flint, 2001; Agranoff and McGuire, 2001; Cebulla, 2000).

Another issue relates to the increasing and often confusing opportunities for groups to be part of different governance mechanisms. Contemporary public management deals with a complex field of 'continuing growth of federal grants and new regulatory programs, increased federal-state programming, the continuation of some federal-local programs, federal initiatives to nongovernmental organizations, and expanded roles for state government' (Agranoff and McGuire, 2001, p.672). Amidst such complexity, the management challenge is 'to draw in the consent and co-operation of several parties: those who can provide resources….pressure groups; specialized charities and public movements, not to mention the general public' (Ackroyd, 1995, p. 31).

- The efficiency dilemma

There is a conspicuous lack of research that addresses the costs and benefits of collaboration for government, although many managers perceive a trade-off between collaborative relationships, managerial stability and accountability (Pollitt and Bouckeart, 2000). The transferring of functions out to the private sector and the use of more market-like mechanisms are often justified on efficiency grounds. It is unclear however whether transferring functions to independent groups, such as NRM groups, is based on efficiency criteria or other goals.

- The effectiveness dilemma

It is very unclear what factors make some processes more effective than others, but it is likely that institutional structures and individuals make a difference. If particular individuals are key drivers of governance processes, then questions arise about how transferable such processes are. Is it possible to design institutional structures or training programs that compensate for variations in

human and social capital? It is likely that effectiveness is a function of both the institutional/governance structure and the types of problems and actions being addressed. For example, a number of NRM issues have been transferred to independent, community based organisations, while government agencies retain more control and responsibility over infrastructure, education and health issues. To be able to assess how well these structures affect outcomes, it is necessary to determine how effectiveness can be assessed, and then develop an understanding of the causes and drivers of effectiveness.

- The legitimacy dilemma

The new structures and arrangements that are being tested often cut across existing relations of power and 'confront' current modes of decision-making and of delivery of government services. Sometimes it is the regional community that has concerns about the new ways that government is doing 'business' in the regions (for example, is government really prepared to accept community priorities when regional plans are developed and are ready to be implemented?). At other times it is government agencies whose modus operandi come under scrutiny as communities increase their demands for better service delivery. Issues of trust and performance are important here. But so too is the overall legitimacy, in the minds of a number of regional stakeholders (and, indeed, of governments themselves), of the very structures, arrangements and processes that are being 'tested' at the regional level (see discussions in Lawrence, 2003).

2.2 The R&D challenge in the Queensland context

In general, agencies within the Queensland Government are seeking more innovative, appropriate, effective and efficient forms of engagement, and increased levels of collaboration across agencies and between government and communities to achieve better outcomes. There are many elements in common across the agencies dealing with land and resource issues, which point to the need for a more collaborative approach to community engagement. These include:

- planning undertaken by land and resources agencies usually requires the involvement of multiple agencies, and often more than one level of government,

- the planning horizon for land and resources is long term, making effective, extended engagement on strategic issues more challenging,

- community engagement conducted by different land and resource agencies will often involve the same stakeholders.

A key issue identified by the land and resources agencies is the need for more collaborative approaches to community engagement. This could involve a range of levels, from everyday contact amongst agency staff, to alignment of timing of community engagement activity, through to collective resourcing of joint, integrated projects. Existing coordination and collaboration arrangements, such as Regional Managers' Coordination Networks, could also be strengthened.

In 2002, Queensland's CEOs Committee for Land and Resources Agencies and the [then] Community Engagement Division of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, commissioned research to identify the barriers and enablers to greater inter-agency collaboration and joined up approaches to engagement at the regional level and reforms to enhance collaboration. The research concluded that enablers of joined up government in the regions included: an overarching, shared policy objective that was jurisdiction-oriented; an alignment between government objectives and regional planning with budgetary cycles, budgets and accountabilities tied to regional planning

systems; regional coordinating and negotiation mechanisms; regional capacity building for undertaking collaborative work.

The research to be undertaken in this project represents part of the second phase of that research. This phase of the EGP involves a substantial R&D program to:

- Assess the conditions under which multi-sectoral collaboration (across levels and areas of government and between government and community) at the regional strategic planning level enhances regional policy management; and

- Inform the development of strategies for improving regional governing capacity and performance.

The project to be undertaken is broad in that it involves a number of active partners and has a multidisciplinary focus. Partners in the project include:

- Griffith University,

- The University of Queensland,

- Central Queensland University,

- Department of Natural Resources and Mines,

- Department of Main Roads,

- Queensland Transport

- Local Government Association of Queensland

The key discipline areas to be included in the project involve political science, sociology and economics, although a number of other disciplines such as public administration, regional planning, demographics, and geography are also likely to be resourced. The university partners are each responsible for a PhD student working on the project, with scholarships funded through the Australian Research Council grant. The key discipline areas for the students are political science (Griffith University), sociology (The University of Queensland) and economics (Central Queensland University). The students will work together on the research project, and then develop their individual theses from the common base.

3. Perspectives on the Research Questions.

There are a number of research questions about engaged government processes that can be identified. For simplicity, these can be summarised as three key research questions:

A. What is engaged government and how does it work?

B. What are the net benefits of, or returns from, an engaged government process?

C. What are the most appropriate forms and levels of government engagement?

The first question revolves around developing an understanding of the engaged government process. The second question is focused on whether engaged government is a worthwhile process, and would involve teasing out the different types of impacts and assessing whether they provided an overall net benefit. The third question is focused on how to successfully implement engaged government processes. More detailed questions can be identified at the case study level where sector, regional and other impacts would be expected to be important.

At the more specific level relating to state government agencies in central Queensland, the relevant research questions might be as follows:

1. Assess the conditions under which multi-sectoral collaboration, integrated planning or independent service delivery enhances regional policy management for outcomes (MFO). Conditions of interest will include strategic (intra- and intersectoral agency collaboration), structural (coordinating mechanisms), procedural (decision-making systems) and social (community strengths) factors. Regional MFO will be examined through:

   a) the resolution of regional programming decisions in line with government outcomes;

   b) the development of inter-governmental and intra-sectoral strategies around programs of work;

   c) the allocation of funding and responsibilities to independent groups;

   d) optimal integration of regional information into broader government processes; and

   e) regional performance as measured by regional MFO indicators.

2. Assess the costs (including transaction costs), benefits and trade-offs for each of the sectors and actors involved in multi-sectoral collaboration, integrated planning or independent service delivery for regional MFO. As the research is focused on multiple sectors and their interests, a multidimensional approach will be taken in identifying the field of social, economic and environmental costs, benefits and trade-offs that are salient to the various sectors involved.

3. Identify what sectoral capacities and strategies enhance the performance and sustainability of regional collaborative relationships. To focus this inquiry, the research will pay particular attention to measures of community strength, institutional capacity and social capital (including 'bridging' and 'linking' social capital) within the government and non-government communities and identify how these qualities are created and/or reproduced in government-community relationships.

4. Determine how regional multi-sectoral collaborations can be monitored and evaluated and 'learning' opportunities extracted. The aim will be to develop (a) a management methodology that can assist public managers to assess, plan, manage and resource regional multi-sectoral collaborative processes and (b) a strategy for institutional capacity development for collaborative relationships.

As the research is focused on multiple sectors and their interests, a multidimensional approach will be taken in identifying the field of social, economic and environmental costs, benefits and trade-offs that are salient to the various sectors involved. Here, some of the theoretical issues and approaches to issues surrounding engaged government are outlined briefly.

3.1 Public policy perspectives

The development of multi sectoral collaborations at the regional level raises a series of questions from the public policy perspective. Public policy, as the intersection of values, interests and resources, (Davis *et al* 1993) is rarely developed only at the regional level. While there is an increasing commitment in Queensland, and elsewhere, for greater local responsiveness and a determination to seek inputs from stakeholders, policy development also operates within the traditional hierarchies of the federal system; of government agencies and other political institutions. The aim in this project is to investigate if there are barriers to making the commitment to more collaboration, both inter-agency and with the community, a reality.

One of the main drivers of the reforms has been financial. The aim is to make government delivery of services more effective by making them more responsive to local needs. In part, the project looks at the way in which budget practices should be reformed to produce more congruent and regional focussed outcomes.

The changing practice of the Australian federal structure also provides a perspective for study. These investigations include the way in which different levels of government are now interacting with each other. Traditional chains of power from federal to state to local governments are being overturned by, for example, direct Commonwealth funding of local and regional programs around certain policy issues. The reform of the public management has also led to the development and dependence on partnerships formed with the private and non- government sector in the delivery of traditional public services.

The political demand from governments of greater community responsiveness has led to the call for more policy involvement by regional actors and by communities, but there are concerns about the development of capacity for meaningful policy involvement at those levels. A key question to be addressed is to determine what resources and skill development is required at the regional level to make engaged government an effective process.

3.2 Sociological perspectives

A sociological approach to the question of engaged governance will involve two stages of analysis: theoretical and empirical. These will inform each other and will provide the industry partners with a deeper understanding of the assumptions and beliefs upon which notions of engaged government are constructed, as well as provide more practical insights into the various factors underpinning 'effective' regional collaboration.

To begin with, it is important to unpack what we mean by multi-sectoral collaboration and to understand how it has come to be seen as an appropriate form of governing in contemporary society. In other words, what are the weaknesses of alternative forms of governing (such as welfarism or centralised decision-making) that have made governments embrace multi-sectoral collaboration as the way forward?

The way we understand this is as follows: under advanced liberalism, the emergence of governance as a form of governing requires the state to work in partnership – or 'engage' – with other sectors of society (such as the market and the community) in the planning and delivery of policies and services. There are many reasons for this shift towards engagement as described earlier in this report, including the perceived need for new governing forms that are both more democratic and more efficient. While government-community partnerships have been a feature of Australian government policy for more than a decade, there is a growing realisation amongst state agencies that government-community collaboration can only be effective if certain institutional conditions are met. One such condition that is seen as particularly desirable is greater cooperation and collaboration *amongst* various sectors of the state – that is different government portfolios and different spheres of government (federal, state and local). 'Multi-sectoral collaboration' is used to describe these institutional arrangements where governments are 'joining up' in order to facilitate more effective engagement with the community.

The emphasis on institutional – as opposed to simply community – capacity, and the perceived need for 'joined up government', suggests that there is renewed interest in the role of the state in planning, development and service delivery. Where, in the late 1990s, governments spoke of the need to build active citizenship and community capacity, now the focus is upon institutional capacity and the concept of the 'active state' (Reddel, 2004). Indeed, scholars are suggesting that these trends are indicative of attempts to 'roll the state back in', in much the same way that authors such as Stoker (1998) previously suggested it had been 'rolled out'.

The idea that the state is being rolled 'back in' is worthy of further investigation, yet there is an alternative way of conceptualising this issue that avoids two inherent problems: First, the state is often depicted as some kind of single, unified entity that can be rolled in or out at will. Second, there is a tendency to treat the state and civil society as two separate and distinct spheres, thereby implying that the state can choose to either intervene in civil society (thereby placing limits on its autonomy), or pull away from it (and hence celebrate the freedom of civil society from state control). It is not the case, however, that when government is small, personal autonomy is necessarily enhanced, or vice versa. Instead it is possible to see how individual liberty plays an important part in advanced liberal modes of rule in which individuals are governed *through* their freedom (Rose, 1996).

It is more fruitful, therefore, to consider *how* the activity of government is performed in contemporary society – by whom and by what means – than simply to trace the process of rolling the state in and out. The Foucauldian governmentality perspective helps us make sense of these trends in the following ways:

The aim of government is not to govern more or less (to roll in or out), but rather to govern 'better'.

Governmentality theorists refer to the process of governing as an 'art of government' (Barry, Osborne and Rose, 1996), which implies that governing is more than just a mechanical process. Instead, government is a continuously improving activity where political authorities problematise what it is they are seeking to achieve, how better they might achieve it, and by whom.

These problematisations are generally referred to as political rationalities (Miller and Rose, 1990) –

the discursive fields in which political authorities pose themselves various questions on the nature and practice of government. At the same time, governing is also a practical activity and relies upon the creation of particular programmatic techniques, or 'technologies of government' (Miller and Rose, 1990), for achieving desired results. It is through governmental rationalities and technologies that ideas of 'joined-up' government emerge as a way of governing *better* (ie more efficiently, more democratically etc). While this new form of governing may draw on elements of earlier approaches (such as the renewed emphasis on the region), the combination of these older elements with new ideas about governing create 'hybrid' forms of rule that may appear quite novel (such as regional governance).

The state and civil society are not clearly demarcated spheres in which one is political and the other is non-political and, hence, free from government intervention.

Governmentality theorists suggest that this particular construction of state and society as separate entities is characteristic of a liberal form of rule that places limits on the ability of the state to intervene in the non-political sphere. One of the strengths of the governmentality approach is that it dissolves this distinction to show how contemporary forms of rule rely on citizens developing their own capacities for self-government so that they may be governed in a way that does not destroy their freedom.

Linked to this, governmentality theorists reject the idea of the state being some single, unitary entity.

Instead, it is argued that the activity of government is performed by a network of actors and agencies who, increasingly, lie outside the domain of traditional state institutions. This is particularly so in light of the so-called shift from government to governance in which the boundaries between the state and civil society are becoming blurred.

As a result, contemporary state theorists attempt to 'deconstruct the state' by seeing it as made up of a complex network of disparate but interdependent activities and agencies that span different levels of government and different fields of society (Jessop, 1995: 317). These are not necessarily co-ordinated or homogeneous, but engage in a 'complex play of supports in mutual engagement' (Foucault, 1980: 159). Where the state is seen to be a single entity, it is because – as authors such as Callon and Latour (1981) have argued – these networks are often 'simplified' or 'consolidated into a stable, but nevertheless contingent, actor-like configuration or 'black box' (Callon and Latour, 1981: 285). This creates an appearance that their actions are the result of a seemingly single and powerful actor such as the state.

If we begin to unpack this 'black box', the power of the state to achieve desired ends becomes much more contingent upon the stability of the networks and the kind of interactions that take place between actors. Contestation and transformation are also more likely to ensue as actors negotiate meanings and objectives, rendering the act of governing much more precarious (Clark and Murdoch, 1997: 45).

This kind of theoretical analysis suggests that the process of joined-up government' or 'multi-sectoral collaboration' is likely to be precarious because it relies on the coordination and cooperation of various state and non-state actors each with their own (sometimes competing) objectives and ways of operating. Precisely how joined-up government takes place; how various state and non-state actors are enrolled into the state network; how their various objectives and ways of working are brought together and negotiated; and what potential exists through this approach to achieve regional outcomes are all questions to be examined in this project

3.3 Economic perspectives

Economists focus on which systems of governance, engagement and development deliver the best outcomes to communities. In doing this, economists typically focus on explaining why problems occur, whether it is worth fixing problems, and what appropriate solutions might be. Different branches of economics tackle these issues in different ways, and some of the possible approaches are outlined here.

3.3.1 Neoclassical economics

A traditional neo-classical economic approach to an engaged governance process is to assess whether there are net benefits available from adopting the process. This type of analysis would involve the identification of the key costs and benefits of an engaged government process, the measurement of these in some form, discounting back to a consistent time period, and the final summation.

It is difficult to identify and assess many of costs and benefits associated with engaged government. Many of the costs can be identified as transaction costs, where the costs of communication and engagement in a process can be likened to the search, negotiation, monitoring and enforcement costs familiar from market transactions. In a marginal analysis setting, the question is whether the costs occurred from an additional engagement process are justified when the benefits are considered.

The transaction costs from engagement are likely to comprise the direct financial costs (meeting costs, travel costs), the time costs (meeting time, travel time) and other considerations. There may also be opportunity costs to consider, where the use of one particular process or set of players means that other processes or partnerships can not be pursued. It is possible to put values on many of the different cost components (e.g. multiplying time involvement by average salary rates).

The benefits of engagement are expected to be more difficult to assess. Some of the benefits that might be expected to flow from an engaged government process include:

- Cost savings in other areas of government

- Reduced conflict

- Increased community satisfaction and capacity

- More sustainable development at a regional level.

It may be possible to apply non-market valuation techniques to estimate values for some of these impacts. For example, the benefits of improved efficiencies or reduced conflict may be assessed in terms of averted expenditure or replacement expenditure, while stated preference surveys or experimental economics could be used to capture values for improved community satisfaction and capacity. Some work would be needed to identify the potential for the different benefits to be identified and assessed.

3.3.2 Institutional and evolutionary economics

Institutional and evolutionary economic paradigms take a much broader look at governance issues. In institutional economics, the key focus is on how the design of fixed rules (hard institutions) and informal rules (soft institutions) affects economic performance and community welfare. Much of the analysis is focused over the longer time period, because many of the effects of changing rules are only evident after substantial time lags. A key focus of institutional economics is on the

incentives that face people, and how changes to those incentives can sometimes result in unexpected behaviour. This field of economics is also concerned with how institutions contribute to capital (economic, social and human), and emphasises the links between the various capital stocks and economic productivity.

Transaction costs are important in institutional economics because they are often used as a comparative measure. Institutions that are more effective in delivering set policy outcomes are generally those that have lower transaction costs. By identifying the different processes available to deliver a set outcome and then comparing the overall cost of each process, an institutional economist can perform a comparative analysis without having to estimate the benefits of a governance process.

Evolutionary economics is sometimes closely linked with political science, because it is usually focused on showing how economic development and the process for change is path dependant. An evolutionary perspective is sometimes important to be able to map out a series of gradual changes that are needed to move from one system to another.

3.4 Public administration perspectives

One aspect that the project investigates is the way in which collaborative processes can be used to drive and develop the 'whole of government' approach. Many public managers or administrators are unsure of the rationale for such processes. In fact, governments commit to community engagement for a number of reasons. These include overt political reasons, such as the need for electoral success or the need to placate interest groups, as well as more genuine commitments to greater efficiency and responsiveness to community interests. In some instances there is a desire to enter into full community partnership.

Decisions to engage, how to engage and what to expect from engagement are ultimately political decisions. The differing rationales, however, produce different levels of engagement. One dimension of citizen engagement has been overlooked in the literature – the way in which the various engagement techniques can be utilised to assist the process of interagency cooperation at the regional level.

Despite public sector reform, public managers still report in a hierarchical structure. The active interagency 'collaborator' may well receive little acknowledgment of his or her efforts if they are not seen to directly benefit their agency goals. Such issues are not the concern of citizens, any more than citizens are interested in which portfolio has relevant authority, interagency rivalries, or even, in a three-tiered federal system, what level of government has responsibility. Their input into engagement arrives as a problem of governance not as a discrete problem for specific agencies.

This part of the project will address ways in which a range of community engagement techniques can assist whole of government collaborations, and take the notion from being a mere exhortation of something desirable to real practices of citizen engagement and regional cooperation between agencies and between different levels of government. A whole of government approach developed through the nature of community inputs may be more sustainable than the internal exhortations to collaborate.

4. Project methodology

The ultimate focus of the project is to identify the net benefits achieved through the use of an engaged government process, and to make recommendations about the preferred format and processes that should be applied. Before these outcomes can be addressed, substantial effort needs to be made to define, describe and understand engaged government processes. This can be described as the first main aim of the project, while the identification of the net benefits from, and most effective forms of, engaged government can be described as the second main aim of the project. The methodology in the early stages of the project is focused on achieving these objectives. A key process will be to map some examples of engaged government so they can be described and analysed in detail. Case studies selected for the mapping exercise include examples of multi-sectoral collaboration, integrated planning and independent service delivery.

A number of qualitative and quantitative research tools will then be applied to develop an understanding of how engaged government processes work. The mapping exercise will be focused on five case studies in the central Queensland region, with a focus on the following broad questions:

- What is the pattern/structure of collaboration within the case study?
- What are the patterns of collaboration in the regional area that link to the case study coalitions?
- Who are the main actors?
- What are the roles of these collaborative partnerships?
- What are the links between the various partnership arrangements?
- What are the costs (monetary, time commitments, other) incurred?

In terms of the first main aim of the project, there are three broad approaches to testing how engaged government processes can create net benefits. These can be termed as the assessment, comparative and action research approaches. An assessment approach is where the positive and negative impacts of an engagement process are tracked to determine what the net benefit might be. An assessment approach is more complex in cases where it is difficult to identify and/or assess the impacts of engagement. A comparative approach is where a situation with engaged government can be compared to a situation without engaged government, (or where different engaged government models can be contrasted). A key issue with comparative studies is to have many of the other factors consistent between the two situations to avoid other confounding influences. An action research approach is where researchers and stakeholders in the project work together to define, describe and understand engaged government processes.

It is difficult to rigorously apply either the assessment or comparative approaches to the engaged government case studies of interest. The assessment process is difficult because of the multi-faceted nature and complexity of engagement processes, and the difficulties of identification and assessment. The comparative process is also difficult because of the variety of other factors that distinguish regions and case studies, and because government processes and changes tend to be relatively uniform across regions. The action research approach has more applicability at this level because its qualitative nature allows the various elements and roles of engaged government to be teased out and described.

In terms of the second main aim of the project, the assessment and comparative approaches have more strengths in drawing some conclusions about what are the most effective forms of engaged government. The use of the case studies will allow these approaches to be applied with some rigour, so that net benefits can be identified and assessed. However, key conclusions about the recommended form and processes for engaged government are also likely to emerge from the action research rounds, where the industry partners comment on, and apply the preliminary

conclusions about engaged government, leading to a more refined and robust set of recommendations.


4.1 Key elements of methodology

Some of the key elements of the project methodology are as follows.

4.1.1 Case study approach

A case study approach will be undertaken in the project, where five case studies of cooperative planning/engaged governance in central Queensland will be analysed in detail. There are a number of benefits from adopting the case study approach. First, case studies are useful at compartmentalising and bounding the research activities, particularly when funding and time constraints apply. Second, case studies are a useful way of performing comparative analysis and highlighting differences and similarities between engaged government processes. Third, case studies are an important mechanism for getting interaction and dialogue between industry partners and the research team, and provide a focal point for research activities. Fourth, the use of case study analysis can be very useful in transmitting the research results and providing more concrete examples to a wider audience. The case study approach will allow both comparative and assessment methodologies to be applied in more detail.

4.1.2 Action research approach

An action research approach will be taken because of its utility in an industry setting. The hallmarks of action research are that: it is a process of collaborative enquiry involving participants from the 'community of interest'; it increases participants' knowledge of their current situation and different courses of action through a process of critical reflection; and participants take informed action likely to lead to improvement and evaluate the effects of that action (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1990). Action research can involve both qualitative (e.g. interviews, focus groups, document analysis, participant observation) as well as quantitative (e.g. structured surveys, event measurements) techniques of enquiry and evaluation. An action research cycle is shown in the diagram below.

EVIDENCE

IMPLEMENT   REFLECTION

IMPROVE
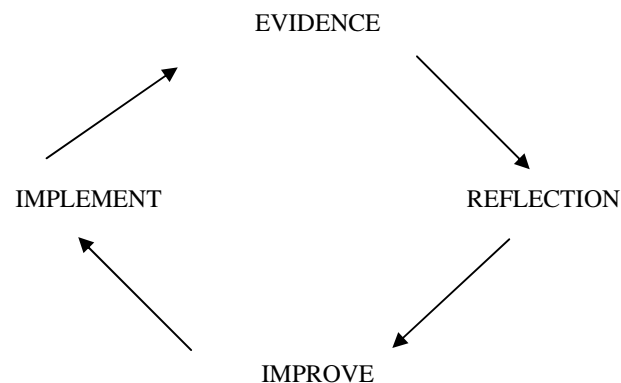
Because of the breadth of the project and the time constraints involved, it is likely that only one action research cycle will be completed in the life of the project. In many cases it will operate by the research team feeding information about the case studies and engaged government back to the project partners, and then working with them to change processes where it is deemed appropriate.

Table 1. Broad methodological approaches to be employed in project.

	Comparative analysis performed across case studies	
Action research used to identify key elements of each case study (particularly in mapping stage)	Case study A	Assessment analysis used to identify the net benefits associated with individual case studies
	Case study B	
	Case study C	
	Case study D	
	Case study E	
	Action Research used to identify key factors and differences across case studies	

4.2 The research team

The key research team involves the chief investigators from the universities (John Wanna, Patrick Bishop, Geoff Lawrence, Lynda Cheshire, John Rolfe), the project coordinator (Diane Guthrie / Peter Oliver), and the PhD students (Tanya Liebrecht, Barton Loechel, Shion Yee). It is also expected that key representatives from the industry partners and the case study groups will also be closely involved with the research outcomes (as would be normal in an action research process).

4.3 Case studies

The case studies selected in the project, together with their broad classification, are shown in Table 2. These are the case studies to be explored in the mapping exercise, while some of the case studies are likely to be selected for more detailed assessment in the comparative and assessment analysis stages.

Table 2. Case studies for project.

Case study	Description	Classification
Fitzroy Basin Association	Regional body dealing with a number of natural resource management issues. Funded by Commonwealth and State government to deliver a number of community and 'public good' outcomes	Independent group
Central Queensland: A New Millennium	Regional plan developed to provide guidance for development and infrastructure and service provision over the longer term. Key focus on importance of social aspects.	Integrated planning approach
Yeppoon Development Planning	Key initiative of the Local Government Association of Queensland	Multisector collaboration approach
Whitsunday Development Planning	State government / Local government / local community initiative, particular relevance to Main Roads / Qld Transport agencies	Multisector collaboration approach
Gladstone Infrastructure Plan	State and local government process, particular relevance to Qld Transport / Main Roads agencies	Multisector collaboration approach

4.4 Operational issues

4.4.1 Governance.

The project has a coordinator to manage a number of operational roles and to be an interface between the various parties. There are separate committees to manage the project, including a steering committee (with representatives from all the partners), and a research committee.

4.4.2 Data sharing and storage

Each APAI and the CIs will address each research question and collect data, sometimes as a team, from each site. The resulting total data bank will be available to the full research team, with a central collection point at Griffith University. This integrated approach will allow the researchers to examine the highly inter-related nature of the concepts under investigation such as political, economic, social and environmental perspectives in valuing policy performance.

4.4.3 Communication and knowledge sharing

A strategy to enhance the learning/build learning capacity of all partners in the project includes the organisation of an *Annual Learning Seminar*. A communication plan and strategy has been developed to provide guidance to the project.

4.5 Project Plan

The research process can be broadly defined as follows:

Table 3. Outline of research plan.

Research Phase	Research tasks	Timeline
Phase 1: Completion of Central Region Current State Map	Stage 1: Documentary analysis of case studies to identify structure of engaged government processes in the region	Findings to be reported at December 2004 *Learning Dialogue.*
	Stage 2: Interviews with Regional Managers, key non-government stakeholders, focus groups and other stakeholders in the case studies to map, describe and evaluate engaged government processes	
	Stage 3: Surveys, interviews, and /or focus groups and desktop reviews to analyse key questions of interest relevant to case studies.	Completed August 2005 for findings to be reported at September 2005 *Learning Dialogue.*
Industry Partner Reflection and development of improvement strategy(ies)		
Phase 2: Detailed assessment of key engaged government strategies, and comparative analysis of relevant case studies	Researchers to perform analysis and provide feedback from assessment and comparative stages of the project.	Commence September 2005
Development and implementation of Improvement Strategy(ies)	Researchers to provide agency partners with summary maps of engaged government processes, definition, description and evaluation data where available, and feedback on the key questions of interest relevant to the case studies. Partners to identify how information from researchers has fed into action learning cycle.	
Phase 3: Monitoring and Evaluation of Improvement strategy(ies).	Tasks related to Research Question 4.	Commence September 2005

5. Conclusions

Over the past few decades, governance and planning issues have emerged as important focal points for government and community interactions in regional areas. There are a number of reasons for this. Regional communities have become more sensitive to pressures for change, particularly as

globalisation has brought competitive pressures to play, and have tended to ask for more support and consultation as a consequence. Communities have also become more discriminating, tending to demand higher levels of service and development, and to be consulted more broadly about change. As well, governments and their agencies have focused more closely on community engagement, efficiency and regional development goals.

While the pressures for more regional engagement have intensified to some extent, there are also a number of countervailing forces. These include the increased concentration of population and wealth in key urban centres, the tendency towards government functions and power being centralised, and the rapid pace of change in commercial, social and economic sectors. Globalisation forces mean that there is more pressure on governments to provide consistent institutional frameworks, with reduced opportunities to favour particular regional areas over others.

Key issues have emerged about what is the best way to provide government services to regional communities, given these pressures to both engage with communities and provide more efficient and consistent social and economic frameworks. In this research project, three main models of engagement are being explored within five different case studies (the case studies will help to flesh out the differences between the three models). The first of the models is a multisector collaboration approach, where government agencies search internally to improve service delivery and planning to regional areas. The second model is the independent group approach that has become commonplace with NRM issues, where various levels of government fund groups for particular roles. The third model is a regional planning approach, where advanced and integrated planning is used to set a development framework one to three decades in advance of development and service delivery.

In this project, comparative analysis, situation analysis and action research will be used to explore how the different models are working in some selected central Queensland case studies, what are the net benefits and advantages of each model, and how various models and delivery of engaged government outcomes can be enhanced in the case studies of interest. The results of the project should be more generally transferable to other case studies.

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