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Understanding Project Participants: Adding Value through Stakeholder Analysis

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BACKGROUND

Traditionally, natural resource management projects in the public sector have focused on the use of engagement approaches which are aimed at working with the 'community' or 'industries' to achieve *shared outcomes*. However, to work effectively with any group, organisation or enterprise, they must be recognised as heterogeneous groups of diverse-thinking individuals who are motivated and influenced by a range of parameters, rather than homogenous, single-entities. In reality, the goals and objectives of assumed 'well known' community and industry group types may or may not align with current government policy or programs. Groups or industries that are not traditionally recognised as having an environmental focus may be working silently to achieve objectives that would otherwise be endorsed by government, if only they were known.

With this in mind, the Landscape Protection portfolio of the Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) uses a social research approach to add value to program logic and better understand and effectively target engagement strategies with project participants for on-ground implementation and evaluation. A stakeholder analysis approach is used in all projects where new participants are involved.

PURPOSE

Understanding project participants is integral to developing a robust and accurate program logic and the subsequent development of key evaluation questions. Simply identifying that a project will work with the community or industry does not go far enough in understanding the values and attributes that make a group or organisation unique. This paper presents the approach used by DPI to refine program logic, identify key stakeholder groups for potential engagement, and influence on-ground implementation and outcomes. This approach is now being implemented across a range of initiatives.

RESEARCH AND OUTCOMES

DPI's Improving Provincial Victoria's Biosecurity (IPVB) project aims to drive short and long term behaviour change to reduce the risk of the introduction and incursion of high-risk new and emerging weeds in Victoria (Farrer and Young, 2007). In part, this will be achieved through mobilising a network of volunteers, known as Weed Spotters, who are enlisted to detect and report sightings of new and emerging target weeds (known as Victorian Alert Weeds) in Victoria. This piece of research focuses on the community groups from which Weed Spotters may be recruited in the future.

A stakeholder analysis was conducted in three phases:

1. An initial scoping study to elicit the numbers and types of community groups operating in the project area;
2. Networking mapping to analyse the connections amongst the groups; and
3. Attitudinal research to determine the knowledge, attitudes, motivators and barriers towards participation in the project.

Scoping Study

For the initial phase of the analysis, data was gathered via desktop research. This largely involved searching through local government or community directory websites to locate community group types. The existence and location of each group type was recorded for the Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Victoria. Research gathered relating to community groups was

overlayed with demographic information from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), target weed distribution data and previous research relating to the location of 'high risk' industries for weed introduction. This information influenced the selection of the highest priority LGAs in which the project would be implemented; provided an understanding of the size of the community group sector and the different types of environment and general groups that might be engaged; and guided the direction of the next two phases of research.

Network Mapping

" Networks…are not only the formal relationships that are used as conduits of information, but they are also a means to formally influence opinion, seek intelligence, locate suitable recruits and otherwise benefit relationships with others" (Howden, 2008). Building on this premise and the information that had been gathered from the scoping study, the second phase of research (the Network Mapping approach) combined desktop research and one-on-one interviews to develop an in-depth understanding of the linkages and exchanges within and between community groups and networks. To extract this information, data was gathered with the following objectives in mind.

To identify:

- Which groups were particularly active or influential in each LGA
- Methods used by these groups to communicate and exchange information/knowledge, both within group networks and to external groups and stakeholders
- The most suitable means of contacting and engaging with these groups
- The organisational structure of group networks or organisations
- A means for distributing IPVB project information to groups to raise awareness of project objectives and associated activities.

In order to guide data collection, each group or network included in the study was assessed against the following prioritisation criteria:

- *Good Communication channels* – the existence of established communication channels such as newsletters and email distribution lists which may be available to IPVB.
- *Degree of Influence* – the level of influence that a group (or members of a group) may have in terms of their position or role in an organisation or community, or their involvement in lobbying for a particular issue. This was identified as a potentially important group attribute with respect to gaining community-wide support of the project.
- *Activities relevant to IPVB* – the extent to which a group may undertake weed management related activities. If a group has demonstrated a level of activity in weed management, they may be more likely to become actively involved or interested in IPVB activities and objectives.
- *Interest in IPVB* – the level of interest that community representatives have shown in the IPVB project to date (through direct correspondence as part of the research).
- *Active group* – current level of group activity, in terms of frequency of group meetings and events as well as how actively they apply for funding.

Research and interview questions were developed, based on the above criteria, and telephone interviews undertaken with representatives from peak body associations, network coordinators and some agency contacts to gain a 'bird's eye' view of the linkages and interactions that were in place within and between community group types.

The data gathered from this research was translated into a 'mind-map' to provide a visual representation of the communication channels, degree of influence, activity and potential interest in the IPVB project for key groups and networks in each LGA. This information was then referenced by project teams and managers to guide the development of engagement strategies.

The use of the MindManager® program to develop network maps has since been adopted across other DPI projects as a useful tool to present complex data. Maps can be developed as simple or complex representations of network relationships, dependent on the needs of the project and the officer using it, to guide engagement. See Appendix 1.

Attitudinal Research

As the final step in this three-phase approach, attitudinal research was used to profile community group attributes with respect to awareness/knowledge, attitudes, motivators, barriers and skills to involvement in the IPVB project. A set of five criteria were developed in order to assess each group with respect to these parameters. These criteria are detailed below:

- *Awareness/ knowledge levels* – of the project issue, i.e awareness of the concept of invasive plants which may escape from gardens and from agricultural crops to threaten environment, economic (eg. agricultural production) and social values. Knowledge of the difference between established weeds and new weeds (not yet here or present in small numbers) was also explored.
- *Attitudes* – towards the project "problem" (i.e. whether groups can participate and want to participate; ownership of the Victorian Alert Weeds risk mitigation concept)
- *Motivators* (eg. reasons for the formation of the community group, purpose of group etc) – but also motivators to be involved in the IPVB project, including surveillance and/or minimising risk of introduction and spread
- *Barriers* - towards engagement in the project i.e. barriers towards becoming a Weed Spotter or towards minimising risk of introduction of Victorian Alert Weeds
- *Skills* – for adopting required practice change eg. weed identification skills and/or knowledge to minimise the introduction and spread of weeds.

A series of broad research questions and more specific survey questions were developed based on the above criteria and the prioritisation criteria developed under the network mapping phase (phase 2). Information was collected through individual semi-structured telephone interviews and one focus group. A profile of 144 community groups was developed to describe each group type and further build on the research undertaken in the previous phase. Interviews were undertaken with a representative from each group, where it was assumed that they would provide an accurate representation of the group's attributes. The consultant who undertook this research on behalf of DPI developed a matrix which scored various attributes of each group. This comprised a matrix based around the indicators of; degree of influence, relevant activities, level of interest, active group, communication channels, knowledge awareness, attitude; skills, and potential to act. A numerical score was calculated for each of these nine indicators based on answers given to the questionnaire. The development of these matrixes provided another tool for officers to refer to when considering strategies for engagement, in terms of which groups to engage with and the strategies most likely to be successful. See Appendix 2.

This data added another layer of information to the scoping and network mapping research to describe the different attributes of groups and the associated influence that this information had with respect to guiding engagement strategies and evaluation. Ultimately, this research was able to ascertain group feelings towards involvement in community weed surveillance and has since been used to develop a plan to guide the overall recruitment of community volunteers in weed surveillance. It has also assisted with increasing the project's understanding of group types, appropriate strategies for engagement and methods for evaluation to assess project outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

This three-phase approach to Stakeholder Analysis added value to the IPVB project through developing a better understanding of project participants; identifying the groups that were likely to be most worthwhile for engagement and evaluation; and identifying issues and concerns raised by groups for incorporation into the key evaluation questions. The approach also enabled the project to reduce the reliance on assumptions for project planning and increase the credibility upon which program decisions and evaluation approaches were developed.

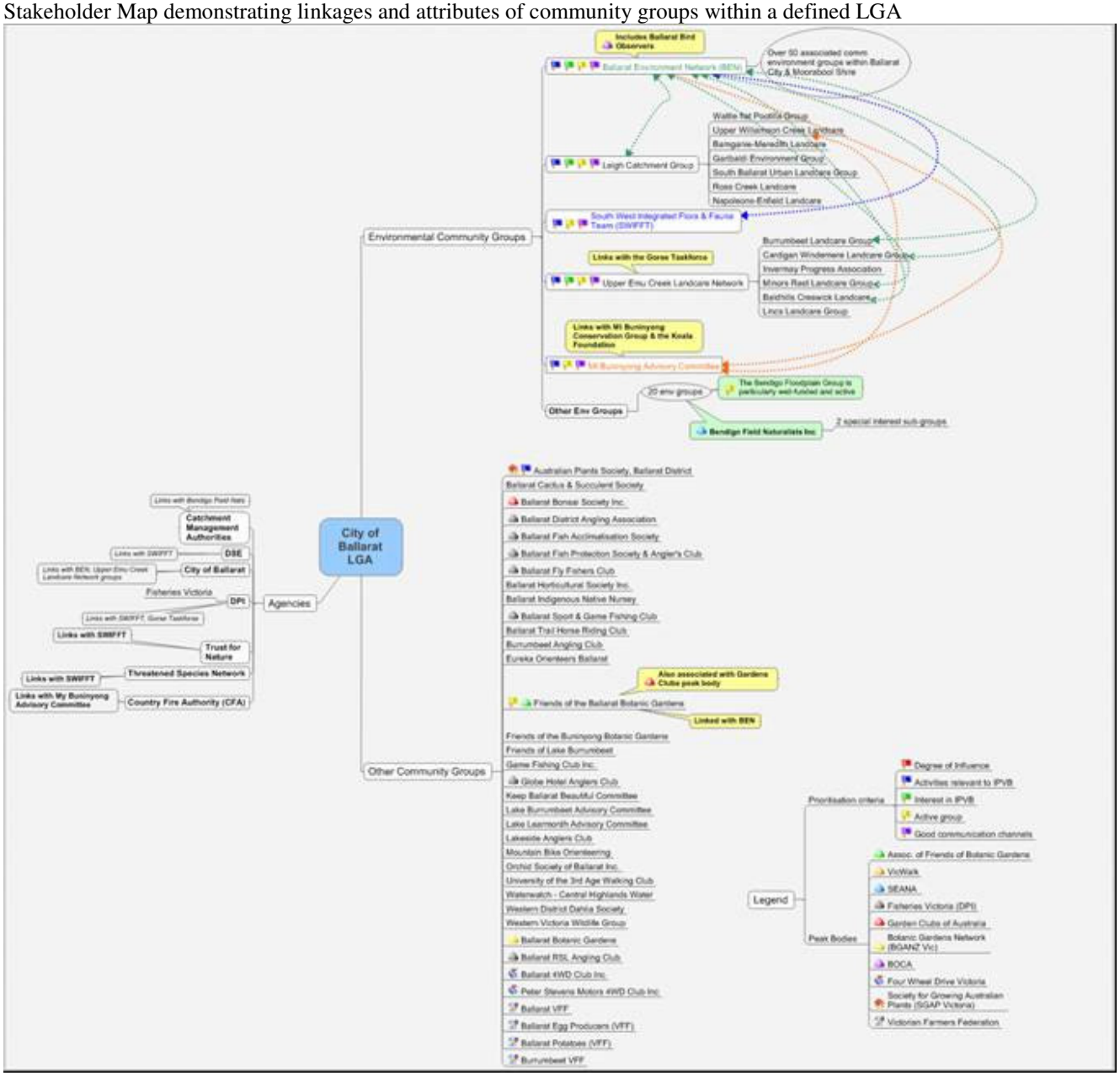
REFERENCES

Farrer, M, & Young, S., 2007. 'Reducing the Risk of New Weed Introductions through Strategic Engagement', Department of Primary Industries, Victoria,

Howden, P. 2008. 'How effective are my networks – Practice change capacity development, booklet no. 3'. Department of Primary Industries, Bendigo.

APPENDIX 1

Stakeholder Map demonstrating linkages and attributes of community groups within a defined LGA



APPENDIX 2

Matrix developed for a sample of community groups, based around the indicators of; degree of influence, relevant activities, level of interest, active group, communication channels, knowledge awareness, attitude; skills, and potential to act.

Name of Group	Degree of Influence	Relevant Activities	Level of Interest	Active Group	Communica-tion Channels	Knowledge Awareness	Attitude	Skills	Potential to act	Total (out of 9)
Bellarine Light Game & Sports Fishing Club	0.50	0.11	0.50	0.50						1.61
Geelong Bushwalking Club	0.60	0.42	0.70	0.79	0.53	0.00	0.87	0.38	0.64	4.92
Geelong Gun & Rod	0.70	0.65	0.70	0.79	0.73	0.00	0.93	0.63	0.68	5.81
Geelong Recreational Fishing Alliance	0.50	0.53	0.50	0.67	0.73	0.00	0.73	0.38	0.68	4.71
Geelong Ferret Club	0.50	0.53	0.60	0.67	0.73	0.00	0.87	0.38	0.68	4.95
Bacchus Marsh Track & Trails Committee	0.35	0.40	0.60	0.64	0.40	0.00	0.60	0.38		3.37
Geelong Fly Fishing Club	0.45	0.21	0.30	0.71	0.47	0.00	0.60	0.60		3.34
Community Fireguard (CFA) Melton	0.70	0.80	0.80	0.57	0.47	0.67	0.87	0.88	0.73	6.47