



**Building evaluation capital in
the environmental field – what
do we have – what do we
need?**

***Building clarity and rigour:
Observations from professional
practice in water and natural
resources policy***

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Acknowledgement of Country

- I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay my respects to the Elders past and present.



Building clarity and rigour in water and natural resources policy

- Can improve effectiveness of reform and investment.
- Observations from experience in water and natural resource policy
 - State policy reform
 - National policy reform
 - Consulting - state and national
- Evaluators can contribute in building capital towards this aim.
- From experience six key challenges emerge, each driving an opportunity to develop evaluation capital.

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Challenge 1

Establish clear objectives

- Often confuse values and science and actions
- Necessarily balance conflicting and contested social, economic and environmental values

Opportunity for evaluators

- Aim for clarity
- Where possible contribute to the formulation of objectives, outcomes and targets
- Drive clear policy action and clearer evaluation

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Challenge 2

Establish clear (program) logic, conceptual models or theory of change

- Science - Conceptual models of biophysical environment
- Program logics link:
 - empirical processes - values-based objectives - management action
- Scientists & policy managers - mixed acceptance of program logic
- logics in this field can become complex, defeating clear communication to stakeholders

Opportunity for evaluators

- Promote simple communication tools for community and political audiences,
- underpinned by evaluation framework rigour for practitioners
- Recognise role for both

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Challenge 3

Constitutional confusion of power and governance

- Promotes democratic values, but hinders clear and decisive policy and implementation
- leads to an obscure and convoluted basis for national programs
- confused objectives and complex and contested implementation and delivery

Opportunity for evaluators

- accept, recognise and respect these parameters
- be clear about how they play out in evaluation frameworks and in monitoring and reporting

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Challenge 4

Scale – temporal and spatial

- Perennial challenge in framing and evaluating environment, water and natural resources policy
- Restoration takes decades, funding cycles 3-5years
- Multiple variables, multiple scales, heterogenous environment
- Murray-Darling Basin
 - Ecologists stretched to think at “Basin scale”
 - Economists stretched to consider local and regional economies

Opportunity for evaluators

- Clarify and be transparent about expected response times and scales
- Underpinning logic may become more prominent than simple statistics
- Multiple lines of evidence – quantitative and qualitative

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Challenge 5

Triple bottom line – evaluation of social, economic and environmental outcomes

- Strong drivers for TBL evaluating / reporting
- Confounded by
 - poor framing of objectives
 - challenge of integrating social, economic and ecological models of change into program logics

Opportunity for evaluators

- Aim for more attention to synthesis of the disciplines

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Challenge 6

Reporting and adaptive management

- All 5 other challenges contribute to this
- communicate simply and clearly with communities
- avoid being simplistic or political
- tension between simple communication and the rigour required for a rational, evidence-based evaluation of a complex policy in a complex environment
- not always acceptance of rigorous, independent evaluative practice, with transparent feedback loops (eg c/w public health or economics)

Opportunity for evaluators

- Foster and aim for simple community communications, but
- Ensure this is underpinned by professional, evidence-based rigour
- Ensure that governance frameworks require evaluation findings to be transparently considered in the next policy or program cycle.



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We are passionate about the protection and restoration of waterways, catchments and water resources. We strive to make a positive difference to the world we live in.