

Report and Acquittal for ASSA Workshop Climate Change Responses across Regional Australia: Social Learning and Adaptation

This workshop was held at LaTrobe University in Bendigo on 10 and 11 April. ASSA Fellow Professor David de Vaus opened the workshop and spoke on behalf of the Academy. The list of workshop participants/paper presenters is provided at Attachment A.

The workshop brought together academics from different disciplines and different places from across Australia who provided examples of how people, communities, organisations and institutions are responding to address climate change impacts. The editors provided an overview of the social learning literature as it had been applied to addressing environmental issues¹. We asked contributors to focus on the social learning processes that facilitated effective climate change adaptation responses. Their papers covered cases as diverse as rural governance, water delivery, community education to reduce emissions, tourism choices, business decisions and farmer decision making. We also included papers which addressed theoretical and policy issues relating to climate change adaptation via social learning strategies. Each paper was discussed and the presenter was provided with a one page review sheet (Attachment B) completed by other participants immediately after each presentation and discussion of the paper (the editors kept a copy of each review sheet so that when the next draft of the paper is received we can also consider how authors have dealt with comments from their colleagues).

Our overarching response to the cases presented is that Australian society is responsive to the climate change message and is, in fact, responding in unique and important ways to this changing climate. Of course the public policy concern is whether their responses are the most appropriate and effective to adapt - and of course mitigate - climate change impacts. While the social response is self evident: if there is less rain we conserve; if it is hotter and dryer we act to reduce bush fire impacts; the organisational and institutional response is far more constrained. As with so much social change it is the context which limits an effective response when the content of the message is clear – human induced climate change is occurring and what can I do to reduce GHG emissions? Brian Head addresses this very issue; ‘The Evolution of Adaptation to Climate Change Policy and Program Ideas in Australia’. There is a long historical line of development of ‘environmental’ policy and climate change is the contemporary driver of public policy. Head’s paper will be presented in the first part of the book setting the scene for the evolution of climate change public policy. Tim Smith from the University of the Sunshine Coast provides a post-normal science approach to enhance climate change adaptation based on the extensive work he has been doing with Sydney coastal councils and the impact of sea level rise on their communities.

Several themes relating to climate change adaptation came out in the paper presentations. Approximately half related to farmers and rural communities. Clearly it is in these places the impacts are most evident. Ian Gray and Geoff Lawrence presented (by Margaret Alston) a paper entitled

¹ Cees Leeuwiss and Rhiannon Pyburn (eds) (2002) *Wheel-barrows full of frogs: Social learning in rural resource management*, Assen, Koninklijke van Gorcum. Meg Keen, Valerie A. Brown and Rob Dyball (eds) (2005) *Social Learning in Environmental Management: Towards a Sustainable Future*, London, Earthscan. Arjen E. J. Wals (ed) *Social learning: Towards a sustainable world*, Wageningen, Wageningen Academic Publishers.

‘Considering Farmer Capacity for Change’ as a result of drought and decline in the availability of water. Their research shows that while the impact is variable it is a major issue for policy makers. Margaret Alston’s paper ‘Gender and Climate Change’ highlights once again that when times are tough in Australian agriculture a particularly heavy burden falls on women. This is true with climate change impacts. While some women cope well, primarily together, many others become more isolated and do not obtain any support through the different social aspects. Aysha Hope’s doctoral work on understanding resistance to climate change in rural communities identifies the nature of the climate change discourse in these places. The challenge is to create a dialogue that enables people to respond, to adapt to a changing climate.

Susan Brumby and John Martin provided cases of what is possible with farming communities to assist them to adapt to climate change. Brumby’s paper ‘Cardio, Climate, Coping and Crops’ shows how effective community connections assist farmers to learn together, in this case around health and well being during extended dry periods. Martin reported on the challenges of engaging rural communities in a discussion about what it means to go carbon neutral. In this case with the Elmore Farm Machinery Fields Days the largest event of its kind in the southern hemisphere. Quentin Farmar-Bowers reported on his research into farmer decision systems which reveals how farmers deal with a multitude of issues including climate. He suggests they see their choices through a series of ‘lens’ that reflect current and future preoccupations. Jerry Courvisanous from the University of Ballarat outlined an innovation policy framework for sustainable development in regional Australia. Kevin O’Toole and Anne Wallis from Deakin University report on two projects (Local Agenda 21 and Cities for Climate Protection) to anchor environmental concerns to political and administrative routines in south western Victoria. These presentations show that in rural Australia, whether working specifically with farmers or the wider rural community change occurs through collective learning and commitment – an important message for centralised policy makers,

Regional communities are both urban and rural and people in communities and organisations in urban Australia are also active addressing climate change issues. John Fien, Ralph Horne and Susie Moloney from RMIT report on a research project which identifies and trials a mix of technological and social “transition mechanisms” for advancing carbon neutrality at the community, predominantly local government, scale. Also from RMIT Martin Mulligan, Yaso Nadarajah, Jodi-Anne Smith and Yael Zalchender report on an innovative scenario planning and climate change program currently underway in Hamilton Victoria. Their work shows that communities will engage in a constructive dialogue about climate change adaptations if provided with a credible process to do so.

Scott Baum from Griffith University reported on social learning and integrated assessment in climate change adaptation at the Gold Coast. Caroline Winter and Elspeth Frew from Latrobe explore the role of regional recreation in a carbon neutral society. A common theme across these three presentations is the need for common understanding around concepts and the need for comprehensive measurement and abatement programs. The social learning process provides an important path towards this common understanding for action.

Managing water in times of drought was covered by Francine Rochford, Bradley Jorgensen and Steve McEachern and colleagues. Who pays for irrigation infrastructure, what is the role of the irrigation providers and individual farmers? And, how does this reconcile with the long term viability of farming communities is covered by Rochford. Jorgensen’s paper complements Rochford’s case as he highlights the importance of trust in public institutions if we are asking the community to change their water consumption patterns. McEachern, Lowe and Lynch from the University of Ballarat show how communities have actually changed their water consumption patterns as a function of both

regulatory and social pressure to do so. Philippa England from Griffith University provides a legal analysis of the planning implications of planning for urban water and its management in south-east Queensland.

While each paper acknowledged the theoretical and policy literature relating to their case we are encouraging chapter contributors to reflect, more specifically, on the social learning factors contributing to or detracting from effective climate change responses. To this end Keen, Brown and Dyball's 'five braids' of social learning provide an excellent framework. Namely, how apparent is reflection, a systems orientation, integration, negotiation and participation reflected in their case.

We thank the Academy for their support with this workshop. As a result of this support we are looking to provide a relevant and timely volume which will be of service to policy makers and program managers in government, as well as individuals and organisations playing an active role in assisting Australian society to respond the adaptive challenges of climate change.

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Attachment A



Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia

Workshop

Climate Change Responses across Regional Australia: Social Learning and Adaptation

Held at LaTrobe University Bendigo on 10/11
April 2008

| Name of participant | Title of presentation | Co-Author/s (if applicable) |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| Assoc Prof Ian Gray | The Sociology of Climate Change for Regional Australia: Considering Farmer Capacity for Change | Prof Geoffrey Lawrence (paper presented by Margaret Alston) |
| Assoc Prof Jerry Courvisanos | Innovation Policy Framework for Sustainable Development in Regional Australia | |
| Assoc Prof Kevin O'Toole | Adapting to climate change: The question of transforming rural local governance. | Anne Wallis |
| Assoc Prof Scott Baum | Social Learning and Integrated Assessment in Climate Change Adaptation: A Case Study of the Gold Coast | |
| Assoc Prof Tim Smith | A post-normal science approach to enhance climate change adaptation | |
| Dr Bradley Jorgensen | Social Learning in the Economic Valuation of Climate | |

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| | Change Impacts | |
| Dr Caroline Winter Dr Elspeth Frew | Holidays at Home: Exploring the Role of Regional Recreation in a Low-Carbon Society | Editor (CW) |
| Dr Francine Rochford | Climate Change and Irrigation Water Delivery: Public Investment in Infrastructure Versus Individualised Risk. | |
| Dr Jodi-Anne Smith Ms Yael Zalchender | Community, scenarios and narratives of action: Reflections on a case study in the Hamilton region of Victoria | Dr Martin Mulligan, Dr Yaso Nadarajah |
| Name of workshop participant | Title of presentation | Co-Author/s (if applicable) |
| Dr Quentin Farmar-Bowers | Can the processes farming families use in making strategic decisions (explained in decision-system theory) become the basis for social learning to help farming communities decide how they ought to adapt to climate change? | |
| Dr Maureen Rogers | | Editor |
| Dr Philippa England | Water Demand Management in South East Queensland 2005-2008: A Case Study of Adaptation to Climate Change | |
| Dr Steven McEachern | How do communities respond to reduced water supply? The relationship between climate change and social change in regional Victoria. | Prof Julian Lowe Dr David Lynch |
| Dr Susie Moloney | Carbon Neutral Communities: The role of Social Learning | Prof John Fien, Prof Ralph Horne |
| Name of workshop participant | Title of presentation | Co-Author/s (if applicable) |
| Ms Susan Brumby | Cardio, Climate, Coping and Crops: Connecting Conditions | Doctoral Candidate |

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| | in Farming Communities | |
| Ms Aysha Hope | Understanding Farming Community Concerns to Climate Change | Doctoral Candidate Co-author - Prof Frank Vanclay |
| Prof Brian Head | Adaptation to Climate Change: The Evolution of Policy and Program Ideas in Australia | |
| Prof John Martin | Farmers Learning about Climate Change: Going Carbon Neutral at the Elmore Machinery Field Days | Editor |
| Prof Julian Lowe | SMARTGREEN: The Impact of Climate Change on Business | Dr Patrice Braun |
| Prof Margaret Alston | Gender and Climate Change | |
| Prof Paul Burton | | |
| Prof David De Vaus | | |