### Session 2: Public Participation at different levels of environmental governance

### Track 2.3. Public Participation in provincial/subnational environmental

governance

# **Public Policy Interventions and Sustainability: Complex Stakeholder Environments**

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#### 1.0 Introduction

Sustainability which by its very nature must emerge from and coexist with natural, economic and social systems is a complex issue for mankind. It is a thorny problem, not only for policy making at different levels of governance, but also, inter alia, for policy implementation, and for innovation in public policy research.

Keast, Mandell, and Brown (2006) argue that three persuasions of governance (expressed as *state*<sup>1</sup>, *market* and *network*) are implicated in 'crowded' policy domains occasioned by an increasing number of actors and by difficult and stubborn social issues. They further articulate these persuasions by identifying the manner in which each of them addresses relationships between actors. In the state mode, hierarchy and authority regulate relationships while in the market mode regulation of relationships is coordinated by the price mechanism. In the network mode collective action is the outcome of trust relationships between actors. Of course Keast et al recognise that most systems are hybrid and in any event networks per se are common to all governance persuasions they identify. While democratic principles might be built into government agency institutional arrangements, their actualisation occurs in market and network behaviour.

Keast et al argue that much is lost when made policies crowd each other out and they argue that in part, a partial solution to this intractable state of affairs may be found through attention to (a) clarity of desired outcomes, (b) better understanding of the operational models that underpin the three governance modes, and (c) construction of a flexible mix of governance modes through which public policy can be efficiently adapted and moulded to fit the issues and processes that emerge on the journey to identified sustainable outcomes. While many

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> In this paper the word *state* signifies a governance mode. The three tiers of government are called *national*, *provincial* and *local* respectively.

public policy workers would most likely agree with Keast et al, they may well also acknowledge that the three heads of facilitation offered are sometimes difficult barriers in themselves.

Keast et al particularly focus on network management in complex systems where problems derive from multiple causes which may seldom be analysed accurately or actioned holistically through *tailored* governance strategy.

In this paper we draw on Keast et al's theories of governance and integration, and our own grounded public policy experience over the years in addressing complex issues relating to environmental rehabilitation, environmental pollution, and work skills capacity development. We recognise that although the three pillars of sustainability (economic, social and environmental) are well known their integration within common frameworks is proving to be elusive. We agree with Caswell (2008) that governance itself should be recognised as a main pillar of sustainable development and that a deeper understanding of governance might facilitate better management of interdependencies not only across different levels of government, but also across different stakeholder groups.

## 2.0 Governance of Complex Issues: A Brief Articulation with Commentary on Parts of Keast et al's Theory on Governance Modes

Complex and intractable policy issues call for hybrid governance solutions predicated on a mix of elements extracted from each of the individual governance modes themselves: the state might contribute accountability and transparency, the market might contribute efficiency and quality control standards, and networks might, in working as they most often do within the constraints of state and market, bring shared responsibility and trust. Would that the best of all possible worlds were so simple: on the contrary existing hybrid systems are hallmarked by a plethora of partnership alliances - a cobweb of networks. Complexity occurs because each governance mode brings additional actors, new processes and mechanisms, and alternative values and goals and this mix morphs into a crowding of the policy arena (Hogwood & Gunn, 1984). This deliberate and formalised inclusion of an array of actors requires yet more complex sets of considerations occasioned by power dynamics, funding, existing commitments, expectations, action, and shared values: a problem shared becomes a problem quadrupled. In turn again new terms of engagement and shared work protocols have to be developed to help different actors to work together and all this is time consuming. The push pull shunt just now described may be prolonged and absorb a considerable proportion of available administrative resources.

In an earlier publication (2002), Brown and Keast suggested that while a mix of governance modes might provide broader options for dealing with complex policy issues the problem was first 'getting the right mix' and then, appropriately managing that mix. They provided a framework (Table 1) to alert decision-makers and policy analysts to the range of possible policy mix choices available.

Table 1: Keast et al's three governance modes

↓ Policy Parameters  Governance  Mode →	State	Market	Network
Outcome Focus	Certainty	Efficiency	Reflexivity
Structural Arrangements	Public Organisations	Private Organisations	Collective Organisations
Relationships	Hierarchical Dependent	Contractual Independent	Social / Communal Interdependent
Integrating Mechanism	Legal authority Formal Rules Regulations Mandates Procedures Policies	Arms Length Contractual Transactions Price Supply and demand	Social exchange Common vision Trust Reciprocity
Institutional Arrangements	Departments Committees Task forces	Partnerships Mergers Alliances Acquisitions	Compacts Accords Negotiation tables Informal networking
Issues Complexity	Routine	Intermediate complexity	Complex
Accountability	To polity and public	To self or board	To group - internal

Source: Constructed from Keast et al (2006) p.39

The Table 1 framework is intended as a starting point which identifies the institutional settings and processes of the governance modes. It enables insight into questions about the constitution of the right mix and helps to inform better tailored governance regimes for complex social issues. Hopefully such tailoring will lead to more flexible and efficacious public policy process. In Western democracy government traditionally coordinates fragmented policy arenas (sometimes superficially), but the suggestion here is that government actually selects the right mix of modes that is fit for the purpose. The aim is to create a domain in which the three traditional pillars of sustainability can be addressed more holistically.

It is not as though the authors advocate that policy mix per se is an operational panacea. They argue that hybrid state/market modes have fragmented the institutional environment and that the many reforms around efficiency, effectiveness, supply and demand, user pays, competition policy and the like, have placed various 'community' and network actors in frantic competition for access to resources. This fragmentation and competition has in turn

caused disaffection for the benefits of change and fuelled concerns about negative social consequences. And Carvahlo (1998) quoted in Keast et al (2006) goes so far as to suggest that neither the state nor market modes alone have provided a lasting improvement in the social and economic welfare of nations: rather they have created as many problems as they have solved. And when Keast and her co authors look to the network governance mode they provide caveats. The network mode, with its associated mediating institutions and processes predicated on horizontal organising principles, may allow more flexibility around the governance of complex social issues. However, it too has its limitations: networks themselves often lack the accountability mechanisms of the state mode, are difficult to manage, and rely heavily on the capability and willingness of actors to seek common outcomes.

General advice is also offered. Apparently democratizing the governance mode (by the inclusion of more actors) may not necessarily of itself guarantee that desired outcomes are achieved. The governance arrangement, whatever its mode, needs to be inclusive, strong in negotiation procedure, clear in vision, and above all to be so operationalised as to convince competing ideologies to align their energies and creativity with identified (hopefully in the case of sustainable development) common goals and agendas: and of course the saying is easier than the doing as opinionated and committed sides slug it out. Above all, patience must inform the governance parameters just now outlined and herein lies another system problem: sometimes, for many reasons, leadership is impatient.

And there can be no assumption that the governance modes themselves are static – immune from change themselves. On the contrary they are an integral part of the mix and they themselves change to accommodate countervailing impacts. Accordingly it is essential that the policy domains are isolated, carefully selected, re-configured to serve the *holistic* social problem, monitored and coordinated in order to achieve cohesive, effective outcomes. While in theory we accept the remedy suggestion made we are not naïve about the difficulties inherent in its actualisation. In dealing with a crowded policy domain, Keast et al (2006) suggest that there will be a need to balance highly visible short term benefits of market mechanisms (often insufficient in themselves) with longer term interventions that may be seen as non-core issues, yet which are required to sustain long term efforts.

Of course in our post-modern, pluralistic, and so called morally relativistic times it is often very difficult to find common normative benchmarks; but difficulty is not impossibility. Thankfully however for sustainable development, nature's laws, which govern life on earth, can be given scientific and positive expression. The challenge for humanity is whether or not the multitude of tribes will be able to find the trust and ability to regulate their (our) vanities

and behaviours in accordance with the requirements of these laws and build sustaining systems compatible with them. We add that in building the three traditional pillars of sustainability from Stockholm onwards, for all its now 'old hatness' to the recently convinced, this building through government and inter-government coordination mechanisms, working multilaterally through summits, bureaucratic processes, word smithing, and communiqués, promises made and kept, or not kept, has been a remarkable achievement and a tribute to the few.

And though such cooperative action remains indispensable it must now be complemented by more intense and focussed government action. Government, through its governance modes, must assert itself as a viable pillar of sustainable development. The complex, intractable global problems that are the subject of this forum require it, and governments heeding the call must now develop the capacity for in-depth analysis of impacting issues, the competence to construct complementary coordinated public policy mix, and the courage and willingness to measure and pace themselves, and their sustainable development progress, against strong national accountability measures, workable processes, facilitation protocols, and international agreements and the like. Scientific benchmarks and what works evidence should be taken seriously. The insights given by Keast et al into the difficulties of public policy making in crowded arenas highlight the substantial public policy challenge sustainable development presents.

To summarise: making and implementing public policy in our times is a difficult and complex task. Policy arenas are crowded and finding a policy mix that enables profit taking now subject to a constraint of sustained profit taking in the future (that is a policy mix that ensures sustainability) is not easy and indeed may prove impossible. Democracy is based on freedom to act but unfortunately it is diminished when 'free act' is not responsible 'free act'. Public policy governance needs to be firm, assertive, inclusive, transparent, and patient – some of the words that once used to describe motherhood and fatherhood. For the sake of sustainable development it must embrace holistic goals to check, balance and coordinate public policy making at regional, sectoral, and establishment levels.

### 3.0 Stakeholder Participation in Sub National (Provincial) Government: A Brief Case Study

3.1 Background to the case: People are creative and industrious at work and humanity's failure to address the detrimental environmental and social externalities of its own creativity has led to a critical situation. The search for ways to implement a just transition to carbon neutral work, as a precondition for sustainable development itself, requires an additional level

of job skilling; government and industry must themselves become skilled to manage sustainable development. It is fitting that our illustrative case study is about labour shortage and work skills acquisition.

Table 2 provides essential background about the case. In brief, provincial government trialled a skills ecosystem approach in an attempt to transfer responsibility for skills attraction, development, utilisation and retention to the workplace arena and to the closer attention of workforce management. The skills ecosystem approach is in effect a move towards greater democratisation of public policy (measured simplistically by greater stakeholder involvement) as it empowers networks of stakeholders to identify the issues that impact on the availability of skills and labour, and enables them to work more closely with government on amelioration of those issues. The process considers all impacting issues, and is not constrained to supplying more and more training. Skill ecosystems policy acknowledges that skills supply alone is insufficient and the good workforce management is a critical factor in dealing with skills and labour issues especially in tight labour markets.

Table 2: Case background

Parameter	Brief Explanation or Comment	
Levels of government involved	National and Provincial. The national government was ideologically righ and the provincial government ideologically left. The national governmen held considerable financial power and the provincial government wa required to work within a skills policy framework dictated by the national government.	
Policy arena	Job skilling and labour supply (at the time of labour shortage)	
Existing governance modes	State, Market	
Brief description of existing policy arrangements.	National government: state mode – dictation of terms attached to funding Provincial government: state, market  However collectively skills policy could be described as a policy silo: isolated, focussed on micro issues, measured by narrow accountability criteria, and standing beside other policy silos, with no inter-silo cooperation or involvement in holistic and coordinated strategy synergies.	
Brief description of the trialled governance mode innovation	Provincial government trialled a skills ecosystem - a network governance mode strategy designed to shift authority and responsibility for skills and labour availability from government to industry networks and other community stakeholders (eg local Chambers of Commerce). Government financed and supported the process for a specified time.  The intention was that in regional and/or industry sectors, stakeholders would analyse their business environment (business settings, labour markets, institutional settings, education and training providers, labour hire firms, contractors, supply chains networks and the like), diagnose the root causes of skills and labour shortages, and strategise to deal with skills gaps and labour shortages. Government would assist financially and through the provision of advice from its experts. It was a new approach in government—stakeholder relationship management, a quite difficult undertaking really given that industry often appears very keen to shift costs to government whenever possible. The available government funding was used to leverage improved workforce management, including skilling for the future. Training was also leveraged from supply chains (high technology areas in particular), and informal training was acknowledged.	

3.2 Progress of the skills ecosystem approach: Table 3 describes the progress of the trial. Areas of operation in the left hand column of the table catch the criteria given earlier that Keast et al outlined to guide governance interventions in crowded policy arenas: (a) clarity of

Table 3: Summary table of the progress of a network governance mode innovation in skills policy

Areas of Operation	Comments	Normative Ratings					
•	What should happen (desired outcomes)	What did happen (actual outcomes)	Rating → Actor ↓	0 - 25%	25 - 50%	50 – 75%	75 – 100 %
Understanding the problem	Actors should bring attraction, development, utilisation, and retention facts to the table, analyse them, consider the economic and social impacts and from this basis develop a firm and clear vision which clearly states holistic and specific objectives and identifies accountability measures.	Actors tended to limit the issues to be addressed because the projects were time constrained. Hence many symbiotic benefits of a range of good workforce practices were foregone.	Government <sup>1</sup>		*		
			Stakeholders <sup>2</sup>		*		
Democratisation - identification of policy	fication of policy s and stakeholders clusion transparent process. Stakeholders should, inter alia, be chosen on the basis of their ability to manage debate and decision making around difficult questions.  transparent process. Stakeholders should, inter alia, be chosen on the basis of their ability to manage debate and decision making around difficult questions.  networks, government and training providers, at the exclusion of unions, labour hire firms contractors and other the supply chain actors.	Government <sup>3</sup>		*			
arenas and stakeholders for inclusion			Stakeholders <sup>4</sup>		*		
Selecting the governance mix	Selection of governance mix should follow analysis of strengths and weaknesses of each governance mode in respect of its impacts in and on policy arena actors and on holistic goals common to multiple arenas.	Governance mix was not considered. Networks were fostered, but outcomes centred on quantity of training i.e. training supply. Some process measures were adopted around collaboration, but these were inappropriate	Government <sup>5</sup>	*			
			Stakeholders <sup>6</sup>	*			
capability within the	Government should promote common awareness about specific and holistic goals and objectives, and ensure that actors are focussed on those goals and are working from shared evidence about them. Actor roles and authorities should be clearly established.	Inappropriate objectives around training supply were used. 'Capability' of the network was neither defined nor assessed. Neither were facilitators selected or initiated into the management of networks. Hence timeframes to reach some degree of capability were variable, and attempts to sandwich this process into 3 year electoral cycles was problematic. However, the mix of training supply and individual industry workforce strategies did impact positively on skills and labour issues.	Government <sup>7</sup>	*			
			Stakeholders <sup>8</sup>	*			
Developing credible (viable and relevant) accountability mechanisms	Government, in consultation with actors, should develop accountability goals which reinforce the understanding of the problem, its democratisation, the governance mix itself, and	Accountability measures were tailored to the state mode of governance.  From hindsight, the role and purpose of skills ecosystem policy should have been re-defined and aligned to the traditional pillars of sustainability.	Government <sup>9</sup>	*			
	stakeholder capacity and empowerment. The consequences of accountability failure should be clearly identified.		Stakeholders <sub>10</sub>	*			

Notes: Rating illustrate author opinion sonly about surrogate measures used to estimate differences between desired and perceived outcomes: 1 and 2 answer the question - how well did government and stakeholders embrace new approaches over and above business as usual?, 3 answers the question - how well did government identify a wider range of stakeholders, include them in negotiations, and develop appropriate accountability measures?, 4 answers the question - how well did employers reach beyond government to include a wider range of actors - trade unions, private providers and the like?, 5 answers the question - how well did government participate in and foster governance mode innovation?, 6 answers the question - how well were stakeholders able to benefit by policy mix innovation?, 7 answers the question - how well did government promote and facilitate awareness about holistic shared goals for long term sustainability? 8 answers the question - how well did stakeholders proact in common goals formation? 9 answers the question - how well did governments develop new and tailored accountability measures?, 10 answers the question - to what extent did stakeholders venture beyond compliance and include accountability measures as performance indicators? Checks (\*) represent ballpark estimates.

desired outcomes, (b) better understanding of the operational models that underpin the three governance modes, and (c) appropriate and optimal governance mode mix. The rudimentary ratings of the right hand column express nothing more than subjective ballpark opinion: they remain uninformed by non-parametric statistical applications and are nothing more than illustrative devices to express opinions formed. Nor should the case be taken to apply to any particular governments in Australia: the case is non specific and general. Enthusiastic and committed networks participating in the trial are generally finding that it benefits them in dealing with skills acquisition and labour shortage difficulties. Some of the stakeholder participants appear to have had insufficient insight into supply chain and operations management factors driving skills acquisition, and accordingly their outcomes have reflected this insufficiency. The most significant issue has been accountability, because government continued to seek accountability aligned to state and market modes and this was driving the wrong behaviours in the networks.

3.3 Comment: Traditional skills policy is focussed on quantity and efficiency of training, presumably to support economic growth. Consequently, and rationally, accountability was aligned to the purpose of the silo rather than to a defined integrated and holistic goal, incorporating the economic, social and environmental imperatives of sustainability. It is insufficient to change the operating system (governance) without also changing its raison d'etre. Accountability itself, of necessity, emerged from and was shaped by the predominant mode of governance which was primarily the state mode in which performance was measured by efficiency measures (cost per student contact hour, numbers of people trained) to the exclusion of other goals. So what, some may ask, that is not necessarily a bad thing. Skills formation, the argument goes, is so intertwined with industry growth and workforce management that bottom line measures of the kind mentioned are entirely appropriate. It is as though the need for industry to skill industry itself for sustainable development, to skill itself in such a manner that its own skills base, action, capacity, and achievement can be aligned to all three components of sustainability, remains unrecognised at this late hour. And this is so even when some progressive industries have begun to push their involvement with triple bottom line accounting beyond simple 'greenwash'.

As a countervailing action, policy makers in silos should be required to address holistic sustainability goals for each of the three pillars (economic, social and environmental) and to seek solutions through policy integration and coordination. Such a process would not of course be easy in the initial stages and the real test is whether government itself and the citizen community have the will to develop and implement skills for sustainability. Keast et al's point (a) – clarity of desired outcome – is apposite here. Without a unified clear and

shared vision, and accountability for its implementation, silo made policy may continue to waste resources through fragmented and contradictory policy unfavourable to a more timely progress to sustainability.

In particular bold sustainable development governance and leadership is needed to drive multilateral public policy reform. And such reform might be predicated on (a) a framework for joint action aligned to the three pillars of sustainability, (b) shared awareness and (c) a shared network of actors willing to own the collective vision. Here Keast et al's third point (fluidity and efficacy of governance mode) is relevant: to be effective in such a policy domain government, in managing the fourth pillar of sustainability, must skill itself in governance qua enlightened network and mixed mode management (forms of governance named by Keast et al). As mentioned Keast et al provide insights into the complexity of shared networks and their work suggest that unless comprehensive frameworks for network action, are patiently and carefully constructed on a grounded understanding of governance modes, desired policy outcomes might be jeopardised. It may be noted, and not flippantly, that beyond knowing (feeling) their own ideological sentiments, some governments face great difficulty in understanding themselves (their own governance modes) let alone coming to a patient understanding of the impacts of those modes as they morph into policy. Properly managing oneself (as opposed to knowing one's feelings) is difficult enough for the individual: it sometimes appears doubly difficult for individual governments and for their policy making agents.

We did observe that competing silo policies do appear to fragment policy efficacy. Policy interventions do seem generally to be focussed on short term initiatives, to be uncoordinated across silos and be no part of holistic vision. Knowledge and awareness is also fragmented and constrained to limited cohorts and in house favourites; there is a certain lack of inclusiveness.

#### 4.0 Bridging Research and Capacity Development

In previous sections of this paper, by writing about institutions, public and private stakeholder participation in environmental governance and democracy, and about sustainable development we have addressed all but one of the main themes named in the call to conference. We now turn to the remaining theme: bridging research and capacity development. We provide a short general comment after which we tabularise, without further discussion, some capacity development research questions that occurred to us as we thought about the case and the conference theme.

It appears to us that in some instances policy responses to sustainability exhibit a lack of coherence, and are short on procedural and systems capacity. Nor do they appear to be sufficiently backed by government will to act. A deeper understanding of the drivers of policy coordination is critical as too is an enhanced knowledge about holistic systemic action in complex public policy domains. And until recently in the Australia Pacific region, with the possible exception of sea encroachment of islands, there has been rather a lacklustre concern about sustainability even in the face of very visible problems. This state of *she'll be right, mate* awareness is rapidly changing and it presents readiness opportunities for the take up of effective holistic policy if it were to emerge. Unfortunately there is debate about the right basis on which to predicate holistic policy vision. Some researchers suggest that a new economic order will need to emerge to contain current production and consumption functions, while others argue that we can continue to use strategic natural commodities with the use of new technologies. Important clarifying research on direction is urgently needed.

Given that the theme of this paper has been allocated to the interdependence across levels of governance section of the conference we should at least offer some suggestions about research focused on new ways of working in public administration. New insights into networking and mixed governance modes across interdependent stakeholder groups are surely needed to accommodate ongoing sustainable development change and herein lies a worthy research challenge. Some relevant specific research questions are contained in Table 4. However a general challenge for research is to find ways to enable policy makers and administrators to continually align and realign the varying degrees of intensity of the state, market, and network modes so that collectively they constitute flexible and adaptive responses to intractable and complex public policy problems. This implies the need for a deep understanding of governance modes and of the nature of human will both in the individual and in the interplay across all stakeholder groups. Complementary research into new forms of funder/facilitator relationships is also generally needed. We agree with those who argue that sustainability will not be achieved, in the main, through one-off, time constrained initiatives or projects. The policy change required to manage scarcity and the attainment of the millennium goals, and to ensure the stability of natural systems, must be developed and perfected over time and embedded permanently in public institutions, economic and individual behaviour, and the expectations of mankind. Policy change must also be educated for if it is to be achieved and this may require intergenerational planning as old habits die hard. Advocacy for such general and generic policy research focus may appear pie in the sky. It is the reality (the pie must sooner or later fall) and the research questions it invites are enormous.

Table 4: Some research questions

Criteria	Research Questions		
Clarity of desired outcome	How can dominant state mode governance attitudes be the traditional skill base and culture of government be extended to embrace a non-traditional governance approach? How can Ministerial portfolio vision be coordinated to and measured by its contribution to unifying generic sustainability goals. What scientific knowledge should inform sustainable development vision? How can stakeholders be convinced to accept modification of specific short term objectives in the interests of sustainability? What further can the UN and its agencies do to foster unified international vision for sustainable development?		
Understanding of the operating systems underwriting governance modes	What system parameters are needed to foster flexible interdependent governance mix strategy? What policy tools and techniques are available to stakeholders? How can supply chain ethics be adapted to address sustainability issues? How can sustainability free riding be detected and what penalties might be imposed to deter it? What sustainability tools and techniques are appropriate regionally and transpationals? What		
Relevance and viability of governance mode mix	y of governments, firms and individuals to search beyond their own immediate problems		

#### Conclusion

In the decades from Stockholm until the present, awareness about environmental sustainability was created, enabling national and international organisations and frameworks were established, and laws and standards enacted. It is now urgent that this beneficial platform be used sincerely and efficiently to address the needs of sustainable development. Public policy intervention in post modern society is increasingly complex and requires a sophisticated mix of governance mode and a strong will on the part of multiple stakeholders for supportive cooperation and behaviour. Our small study on public intervention for job skilling (industry can serve the sustainability through efficient and sustainable work practice predicated on green job skills and audits) revealed that stakeholders, including government, each find it difficult to look beyond their own needs, narrowly defined, when they enact or react to public policy. Considerable and urgent research into ways of breaking this impasse is required.

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