

A course developed by ...



RANGELANDS AUSTRALIA

BUILDING EFFECTIVE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENTS

Postgraduate Course – MGTS7976

Available Semester 2
(Subject to minimum numbers)

OVERVIEW

Members of rangeland communities are increasingly engaged in meetings to discuss and resolve natural resource use and management issues and/or participate in planning at a local or regional level. The outcomes of these processes, which can have important and far-reaching economic and environmental implications for rangeland enterprises depends on the resilience and quality of the relationships of those involved.

Participatory processes have been undertaken in rural Australia over several years with varying degrees of success in the outcomes. Many people have tried to implement these processes and found their multi-dimensional nature difficult to manage while participants often feel their point of view has not been taken into account. Yet they still remain an effective democratic process for achieving change and allowing communities to participate in areas that impact on them.

Rangelands Australia believes there have been many recent advances in approaches to stakeholder engagement processes. We have set out to design a post-graduate course in building effective stakeholder engagements that incorporates the outcomes of current research in devolved processes for rangelands communities, based on a set of fundamental principles.

The course aims to develop participant knowledge and skills pertaining to the design and management of a stakeholder engagement process at whatever geographic or community of practice scale is required. It will provide practical experience in managing the inter-related aspects of the processes. It does not set out to address each of the aspects of management in detail but rather focus on the areas that research has indicated are problematic and impact on achieving successful outcomes.

Participants will use their own involvement in a stakeholder process to investigate aspects of the key stages of inception, planning, running, implementation and evaluation. Each stage requires a set of actions by the process manager to ensure quality outcomes.

With the development of regional natural resource management committees, skilled stakeholder participation will be vital for achieving successful outcomes to the benefit of the rangelands and its people.

NOTE: Students undertaking this course need to be actively involved in a participative process, involving several stakeholder groups, to complete the learning activities and assessments. For example, active in the development of Water or Regional Plans; active in Local Government planning; or involved in community engagement with respect to a National Park, a development initiative, etc.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

On completion of this course you will be able to:

- Develop and manage a multi-stakeholder process
- Derive an understanding of the diverse culture, values and needs of individual stakeholders based on credible information

- Examine own style in working with diversity within a group
- Evaluate the appropriateness of participatory processes in relation to issues and ethical implications
- Develop a process that respects the values and cultures of all participants
- Examine and resolve power, values and trust issues throughout the process
- Examine the key communication issues impacting on the process and develop appropriate strategies
- Create a climate that encourages an openness to change
- Engage ethically with others
- Analyse complexity and integrate multiple viewpoints into the process.

COURSE STRUCTURE

Course modules include:

- Inception of stakeholder engagements
- Planning
- Running the process
- Implementing the outcomes of the process
- Monitoring/review of the process

LEARNING FACILITATORS

Dana Kelly (Coordinator) (BSc Env; MAgSt Ext). Dana has lived or worked in the rangelands for over 20 years. She recently completed her PhD on 'Power relationships in community participation', the case study region being south-west Queensland. Dana has completed a major report on how government and other agencies could improve community participation in the rangelands. This theoretical understanding of participatory processes is complemented by 15 years working in government, firstly in environmental education for the National Parks and Wildlife Service; and then as state-wide Extension Coordinator for weeds and feral animals in the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. Dana has managerial experience at a tourist resort in the rangelands, and on her own small cattle enterprise in south-eastern Queensland.

Dr Fiona Leverington (BSc, PhD). Fiona has worked in the field of community engagement since the late 1970's, mostly for Queensland parks & Wildlife Service. Her work has ranged from talking to park visitors and local communities to planning state-wide public contact initiatives. Her PhD work in Indonesia focussed on how cooperation could be fostered between government, NGOs and local communities to improve conservation and social outcomes.

REQUIRED TEXT BOOKS

There are two textbooks required for this course.

- i) Keen, M, VA Brown & R Dyball (Eds) (2005). *Social Learning in Environmental Management*. Earthscan, London.
- ii) Alsin, HJ and VA Brown (2004). *Towards Whole of Community Engagement: A practical toolkit*. MDBC, Canberra. (Free copies of this have been kindly supplied by the Murray-Darling Basin Commission.)

Students are also supplied with a book of readings that includes essential materials required for completion of learning activities and assessment items.

ASSESSMENT

There are no 'examinations', just three (3) assessment items for this course.

Assessment 1: Participation in online activities - 35%

Throughout the course you will be expected to complete a number of learning activities online. These will involve responding to readings and other stimuli, reading and responding to the postings of other students, and reflecting on your experience in stakeholder processes.

Assessment 2: Reflection on Process – 25%

You will analyse interactions in a participative process in which you are engaged, and develop alternative strategies to improve the process outcomes.

Assessment 3: Case study - 40%

You will evaluate a participatory activity or project in which you have been involved, using an existing framework. Develop this into a case study (2500-3000 words), supporting your evaluation with theory and examples. Drawing on current literature and experience, demonstrate ways in which this particular process has achieved its aims, where it has fallen short, and what could be done to make the process more effective in the future.

BACKGROUND TO THIS COURSE

The need for this course was identified by a national survey of education and skills needs for success in the rangelands. The course was developed by Rangelands Australia. It provides a unique, rangeland-specific view of stakeholder engagement, widely applicable across Australia. The structure, content and resources used in this course were influenced by producers from Queensland, NSW and SA involved in catchment and regional groups; catchment and NRM coordinators from Q, NSW & SA; community development consultants; policy makers at State and Australian government levels, community liaison officers with mining companies; regional managers from Q Department Primary Industries & Fisheries, Q Department of Natural Resources & Mines, Greening Australia, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and the National Native Tribunal; and researchers from CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, The University of Queensland's School of Natural and Rural Systems Management, and University of New England's Environmental Dispute Resolution Centre.

A draft of the course was reviewed by an equally diverse group of rangeland stakeholders.

This course was first delivered in late 2004. Since then, the course has been revised and restructured in the light of recent research on more effective stakeholder processes.

COURSE EVALUATIONS

Students completing this course in 2005-07 were asked to evaluate the perceived relevance, practicality and quality of the course and its delivery (on 1-5 scale, with 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree). The following average ratings were received:

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| • Clear and relevant learning objectives | 4.3/5.0 |
| • Satisfied with the course content | 4.3/5.0 |
| • Satisfied with the amount of contact with the Learning Facilitators | 4.7/5.0 |
| • The Learning Facilitators provided useful guidance and support | 4.7/5.0 |
| • I gained new skills and knowledge | 5.0/5.0 |
| • Learning and assessment activities challenged me to think | 4.7/5.0 |

- Course is well structured and components well integrated 4.4/5.0
- Course is relevant to my workplace/business 4.6/5.0
- Course is relevant to my future in the rangelands 4.6/5.0
- Overall, I'm satisfied with this course 4.7/5.0

Students have also provided the following general comments on this course:

- *"My methods of engaging pastoralists have expanded and I have become more aware of their needs during this process"*
- *"An important choice as a foundation course – highlights the importance of stakeholder interactions"*
- *"...challenging stuff that forced me to think at a different level and apply new theories to my work with community development. Very helpful and applicable."*
- *"The course has been of great value, particularly due to its relevance in regional NRM, in which I am employed. It has addressed relevant issues and has been well coordinated. Engaging regional stakeholders effectively is the basis for successful NRM."*