

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Community Engagement in Water

Dr Tony Webb and Professor Shelley Burgin from the School of Natural Sciences, together with Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (WSROC) have been awarded a UWS Research Partnership grant to investigate how best to stimulate community engagement to address regional water issues.

'Water management is a critical issue for Australia as the driest continent' says Dr Webb. 'The allocation of water has the potential to create social conflict between urban and rural communities, and between residential, agricultural and recreational users as well as the needs of the environment. Governments have recognised the need to include the community in decision making about such a scarce resource but there remains a gulf between what has been achieved and real community engagement in water management planning. In part this has been the result of top-down approaches, using a model for engagement that assumes working through representative stakeholders will be sufficient to identify community concerns. This will build both a consensus and champions for change at community level around best-technical management plans that seek to harmonise any conflicting concerns.'

The research team will be recruiting, training, and supporting local "action groups" within each of the participating local government areas as the "action-researchers" who will undertake the bulk of the on-ground survey work. This will include a series of meetings, training workshops, and coordination conferences. It will also involve participation in local action-group meetings that progressively plan, act, review, and re-orient activities. A culturally appropriate survey tool will be developed and the implementation of the main survey will be undertaken by participants at local levels. There will be meetings in each area to review progress, analyse and discuss themes emerging from the data.



The outcomes of this research will emphasise approaches likely to genuinely engage communities in understanding regional natural resource management, what might be done at community level, and the important policy decisions that will need to be taken.

Project Title: Engaging Communities in Water Management Planning

Funding has been set at: \$27,434

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For more information on UWS Research Partnership Program, check:

http://www.uws.edu.au/research/researchers/funding_opportunities/internal_research_grants