

Watering Wetlands

A case study – Environmental Flow Reference Groups

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Science is often not the main Currency in Decision Making

- Rogers (2006) “the prevailing view of scientists as experts who solve environmental problems is fallacious”
- Watering decisions often made in Flow Reference Groups – Agencies, NGO’s, Irrigators, Graziers, CMA
- Science informs environmental needs, risk/outcomes
- However in reality other issues often dominate/ influence decision making - Issues such as:
 - member understanding, values, vision, trust, cultural issues, policy differences, politics, power plays.....

A Case Example: Flow Reference Groups

- Within the Regulated Water Sharing Plans in NSW wetland watering decisions involve:
- Short Timeframe to make decisions– days/weeks.
- Consensus decisions between stakeholders:
 - A defined volume of water to work with
 - Possible release targets – bird breeding, RRG
 - Scientific information that informs environmental needs – eg to support life cycles

Decision Context.

- Operational constraints eg system losses.
- Antecedent conditions
- Time since last watering - tradeoffs
- EFRG's work with what they have at hand
- After considering the above the target is selected
- Hopefully good environmental outcomes are achieved that can be defended politically, socially and its economic impact

Who Gets the Priority



Good Environmental Outcomes – It is not just about adding water?



To Effectively Inform FRG's – We need site specific Information

- Synthesis products are helpful but are not enough
- EFRG's need volume/duration of water required for defined outcomes:
 - To sustain a vegetation community through a life cycle. Ideal duration - optimum watering regime.
 - To complete a bird breeding event ? Is an event completed at Fledging? Where are they feeding? Are we watering these areas?
- What are the optimum flow sequences? We are making decisions on events not outcomes.

To Maximise the Communication of Science into Decision Forums

- Seek opportunities to Participate in Flow Reference Groups
- Commit to the long haul
- Understand local information needs
- Build trust across factional divides
- Communicate effectively
- Provide useful easy to use information

A way forward for effective use of knowledge for improved outcomes

- Acknowledge our Imperfect understanding – science
- Recognise it is an Imperfect decision process – people
- Participate in a shared learning experience
- Help design a shared vision - future
- Participate in Adaptive Management until we get it right