

Using Community Deliberation Forums for Public Engagement: Examples from Missouri, USA and New South Wales, Australia

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Abstract

Community participation in public engagement needs to reflect the diversity of stakeholders impacted by policy issues and to take into account social, economic, and environmental concerns. Yet efforts to do so often deteriorate into contentious, polarised proceedings leaving people angry, frustrated and feeling like they have little power to influence important decisions affecting their lives.

One approach gaining more wide spread use in public engagement processes is deliberation. Public deliberation is people coming together, face-to-face, to talk about a problem. Through a reasoned, collaborative dialogue, they explore their options by weighing the costs and consequences of their decisions in the context of the views of others.

This paper discusses the deliberative process, its design and how it was successfully used in Missouri, USA in three different policy areas: health care, regional economic development and land use planning. Also described is a proposed community deliberation pilot project for New South Wales, Australia, with Charles Sturt University, Orange, and a local Catchment Management Authority (CMA). The CMA's charter aims to involve communities in decision-making, seeking to make best use of catchment knowledge and expertise.

Keywords

Deliberation, forums, participation, community, stakeholders

Introduction

There is increasing recognition that the public wants, and should have, more of a voice in shaping policy which impacts them, such as health care, environmental quality, reproductive rights, education reform, life sciences, and the like. Since the mid twentieth century, there has been a shift from a more managerial, top-down approach (Luke 1998, p. 4; Bielele and Cayford 2002, pp. 2-3) to one where the public is demanding more access to information and more substantive input into policy decisions (Bielele and Cayford 2002, pp. 3-5). Also supporting this need is the nature of public issues themselves, as they have become more complex and interrelated "crossing jurisdictional, organisational, functional and generational boundaries and are intertwined with other public problems" (Luke 1998, p. 8). With contentious, complex public issues there may be no one specific public, or group, that can resolve the issue; it requires participation from a number of different publics. Many of

these public policy issues are 'wicked' and intractable, often 'with no solution, only temporary and imperfect resolutions'. They have no "narrowly defined technical definitions and solutions and no clear-cut criteria" to judge their resolution (Fischer 1993, pp. 172-3). Heifetz and Sinder's (1988, pp. 185-7) typology of public problems classifies these wicked, intractable problems as Type II and Type III, where people may not even agree on the problem definition, never mind the resolution. Stakeholders impacted by the issue often hold differing values, beliefs, cultural traditions and worldviews, contributing a social construction to public issues beyond the purview of scientific and technical data. Thus any public engagement processes must address the social construction that drives people's decision-making.

The role of deliberation in public engagement processes

To date, public engagement processes have not been a panacea. Public officials are aware of the challenges presented by wicked problems, yet many attempts to access public input have not been very successful. In general, public meetings tend to leave people discouraged. One common scenario is meetings dominated by polarised groups of individuals in a scenario of "decide-announce-defend" (Forester 1999, p. 63). These become futile, adversarial encounters shutting out lesser-heard, yet equally impacted people. Even when public participation is encouraged, it is likely that the community does not lead the process, but rather, it is a top-down "expert-client" approach where knowledge is diffused to communities by experts (Powers and Pettersen 2001).

What is needed is a different approach than the usual 'us against them' scenario; an approach that engages the public to both to take action and initiate change, and to increase the two-way interaction between policy makers and those impacted by policy (McCoy and Scully 2003, p. 117; Abelson et al. 2003, p. 240), without polarising and shutting down the conversation. Deliberation fills this role. Also called democratic deliberation, it is defined as "to weigh carefully both the consequences of various options for action and the views of others" (Matthews 1994, p. 110). In addition to the careful weighing of choices, deliberation has several other characteristics (Burkhalter et al. 2002, pp. 401-4). One is information, with more deliberation occurring if information is accurate and relevant. Another is a range of two, preferably more approaches (to prevent polarisation and a simplified yes/no to resolve the issue), which reflect a diversity of perspectives. One-third is broadly-shared evaluative criteria for considering solutions and reaching decisions, which takes into account the views of others regardless how divergent. And, finally, deliberation requires participants to apply their evaluative criteria to all the proposed solutions to assess how each of these impacts other stakeholders, and what the likely trade-offs are between the solutions.

Deliberative dialogues build on the capacities of citizens to *think*, *talk* and *act* together in their common interests and are designed to produce a change in the way people habitually interact with each other over public issues. The role of face-to-face public engagement cannot be minimised — human relationships are pivotal in public policy issues (Wade 2004, p. 361; Burkhalter et al. 2002, p. 400). People come together in a dialogue over the tensions created by conflict in a contentious public

issue, which forces them to face what they value. They realise they cannot 'have it all' and through deliberation — critical thinking and reasoning — they struggle over values such as “community, faith, responsibility, civic virtue, neighborliness, stewardship and mutual concern for each other...while living in a free market economy where intrinsic non-market values are not quantified, yet consideration of these values are essential to resolve contentious public issues steeped in value-based choices” (Yankelovich 1999, p. 202). In deliberative dialogues, when people do not polarise but instead, struggle together with a contentious issue, they can discover what they share, despite what they don't agree on.

Deliberation differs from debate and dialogue, although dialogue can encompass or result in deliberation. Table 1 illustrates the differences between the approaches. Each has its value when matched appropriately with a public issue and public engagement.

Table 1. Characteristics of debate, dialogue and deliberation

Debate	Dialogue	Deliberation
Compete	Exchange	Weigh
Argue	Discuss	Choose
Promote opinion	Build relationships	Make choices
Seek majority	Understand	Seek overlap
Persuade	Seek understanding	Seek common ground
Dig in	Reach across	Framed to make choices
Tight structure	Loose structure	Flexible structure
Express	Listen	Learn
Usually fast	Usually slow	Usually slow
Clarifies	Clarifies	Clarifies
Win/lose	No decision	Common ground
Most useful when a position or course of action is being advocated and winning is the goal	Most useful when people want to talk together about something without desiring any particular outcome from the conversation	Most useful when a decision or criteria for a decision, about the best way(s) to approach an issue or problem is needed

Deliberation is not about winning or losing; it has a different goal. It is about people talking through their personal experiences, their concerns, what they value in regard to an issue as well as the hard facts. Then, making *choices* about what is important to them, taking into account the values, possibly divergent, of others. The goal is not to change anyone's mind about an issue — this may happen but

it may not. People learn they can find common ground and work together on issues in their communities even though they may see the issue from very different viewpoints.

Deliberative Public Forums — naming, framing and taming public issues

There are some essential steps to the deliberative forum process. First, the issue must be ‘named’ or identified. For example, it is not sufficient for people to say they want to come together to talk about crime. What is it about crime that concerns them — lack of police enforcement? Adults committing crimes? Kids committing crimes? Let’s say it’s ‘kids committing crimes’. Once the topic is ‘named’, then the next step is to ‘frame’ it.

Framing an issue lays out a ‘schematic’ that will encourage the public to consider and discuss it (Kettering Foundation 2002). The framing involves creating different ‘approaches’ or ‘options’ to resolving the problem or other methods that serve to prompt deliberation. One frequently used method to frame an issue is by bringing together stakeholders to explore how they see the problem and getting their input in what resolutions might need to be considered. However, this is not always possible. Cost, time and scale may impact naming and framing an issue. For example, in two Missouri cases (cited later in this article), the issues were framed in an alternative manner. Forums were being held state-wide and it was not possible to bring all stakeholders together. In the example from health care, survey data that had been collected from over 7000 interviews was used to frame the issue. In another example about public engagement on life sciences and regional economic development, the ‘framing’ involved a series of questions used to facilitate deliberation.

Framing an issue takes careful consideration. It requires that the tensions associated with the problem be included in whatever approach is used to enable deliberation to occur. What results is called an issue book or discussion guide that presents different, competing ways of dealing with the issue identified. If an issue book is written too simplistically, lacking the tension that actually exists with the issues, then the approaches designed are often inadequate to induce deliberation. Without tension, there isn’t an issue. As an example, consider the National Issues Forum book¹ called *Kids Who Commit Crimes: What Should Be Done About Juvenile Violence* (1992) that frames three approaches for dealing with the children committing criminal acts. One approach is deterrence — get tougher with young criminals. A second suggests addressing moral standards — that families, schools, and the media have abdicated responsibility for teaching right and wrong. And a third is about risk factors, tackling juvenile crime at its roots. In the *Kids Committing Crimes* case, any approach alone is

¹ National Issues Forums (NIF) a nonpartisan, nationwide network in the United States of locally sponsored public forums uses issue books for the consideration of public policy issues. NIF is rooted in the simple notion that people need to come together to reason and talk, to deliberate, about common problems. These forums, organised by a variety of organisations, groups, and individuals, offer citizens the opportunity to join together to make choices with others about ways to approach difficult issues and to work toward creating reasoned public judgment <<http://www.nifi.org>>.

insufficient to resolve the problem. In fact, it may take all three or necessitate the design of a fourth approach with aspects of the other three. By designing the issue book so that it reflects the realistic tensions within the issue itself, and without showing a bias towards the approaches, it encourages deliberation because it forces people to make choices about the issue. They consider the action they may wish to take and the consequences and tradeoffs associated with that action.

Once an issue is named and framed, the 'taming' comes in with the public beginning to discuss and deliberate it. At this stage, a forum convener trained in convening public deliberation forums will develop a course of action to bring together stakeholders with differing opinions to participate in the public forum. Moderators, also trained in deliberative methods, lead the forum and begin by setting up guidelines for how the public will interact in the forum — one person speaking at a time, no interrupting, no one dominating the discussion — to assure that all stakeholders have an equal voice. The moderators, remaining neutral throughout the process, are able to manage the tensions and conflict that may arise while at the same time recognising that tension is necessary to promote deliberation. They encourage everyone to participate and listen respectfully. Guiding the dialogue, moderators pose questions that facilitate deliberation while mitigating opportunities for participants to polarise on issues. Records are often present and document what is said for use in reporting out to the public.

A different way to decide: Steps in the deliberative process using a hypothetical case

The following hypothetical case of water quality contamination in a local dam drinking water supply has been designed by the Australian authors to illustrate the deliberative process.

Contamination of water running into the local dam, supplying drinking water to the town, approaches unmanageable levels. The local council responsible for monitoring the dam's water quality reports the situation to the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) who immediately steps in to investigate. A water quality assessment is undertaken. The results of biological, physical, chemical and aesthetic tests show high levels of phosphorus and above average levels of inorganic and organic compounds. DEC conducts a further investigation to pinpoint the sources of contaminants. Their research shows that runoff from residential areas in the nearby city, coupled with grazing and cultivated land within the catchment, were the primary sources of contaminants. DEC discusses the situation with the local council, and sets a deadline of one month to come up with a solution. If no solution can be found, the local council will be responsible for \$500,000 immediate costs to begin trucking in alternative water supplies. They would also be fined for the inappropriate management of a public water source under the state *Environmental Protection and Assessment Act 1979*. The mayor calls an emergency meeting of the local council to determine the best way of addressing the situation.

The environment manager of the council has been working with the local university on developing solutions for a major erosion problem in the catchment, and has been successfully utilising community deliberation as a means of dealing with the problem. Deliberation presents a different way for the community to make

decisions, mitigating polarisations and really making people think about the consequences of their choices. At the emergency council meeting, he outlines the process that had been used and recommends the council use the deliberation process as a means of engaging the community in what is an extremely complex issue. The council is agreeable, willing to try this approach because so many times in the past community meetings have degenerated into stand-offs and communication has broken down. The council calls in the university to facilitate the deliberation process as they have faculty skilled in this.

The following components illustrate the naming and framing stages that takes place in this hypothetical situation:

- **Issue identification (naming)**

The university facilitator meets with the Utilities and Environment Committees of the council to establish the key issue. This situation is relatively straightforward — ‘What can be done to fix the chemical problem?’ In other situations where the issue is not as clear, a group of stakeholders impacted by the issue would be involved in the naming process. The complexity in this issue lies in the choices the community has about resolving the issue. This complexity is dealt with in the information and framing listed next.

- **Stakeholder identification (and information gathering)**

The two council committees, with the assistance of the facilitator, the council’s environmental manager and DEC identify key stakeholders in the issue. The university then commences a fact-finding mission. DEC provides technical advice, along with the local university and council employees. Legal advice is sought from a local law firm. The university team conducts interviews in person and over the phone with representatives from the community. These included landholders, Indigenous land council representatives, parents, the managers of farm chemical businesses operating in the area, etc.

- **Identifying choices (framing)**

After a couple of weeks, the university team in consultation with the council committees and based on the information gathered, identifies three possible options:

- 1) Leave the situation as it is. The government is always telling us what to do, and all that’s happening here is another attempt at controlling our every move.

Pros: We keep control of our own destiny

Cons: No drinking water, cost of carting water

Council is fined by DEC

- 2) Ban application of the chemical

Pros: Stops problem quickly, great for the environment

Cons: Crop production drops by 60 per cent making local farms unviable

- 3) Integrated Pest Management

Pros: Minimises crop losses, more sustainable in the long term

Cons: Expensive and slow to implement, no guaranteed response in short term

- **Compiling the Issue Book**

The university facilitator, in consultation with a representative group of stakeholders, leads a process to prepare an issue book (or discussion guide) outlining a summary of the different approaches including

the trade-offs and likely consequences. While this is happening, the council finalises the date and location of the deliberative forum, books the venue, places notices of the upcoming event in the local paper, agricultural supply outlets, on ABC radio and sends notices to landcare groups. The forum is scheduled to last for two hours.

The 'taming' of the issue takes place during the forum. The different stages of a forum are discussed below.

The forum

Council staff organises the forum and sends out invitations to stakeholders. They also establish a system to allow participants to be compensated for expenses incurred as a result of attending the forum, e.g. babysitting. The deliberative forum is held two weeks later.

- **Welcome**

As the participants enter the room they are given a copy of the Issue Book. After allowing participants time to get comfortable the moderator from the university commences the forum by welcoming participants, running through the program and setting the ground rules.

- **Personal Stake**

The 'personal stake' is a critical part of the forum as it sets the stage for participants to see a 'personal side' of others, helping to bring the discussion to a more human, less abstract level. The moderator encourages each participant to think about the issue and asks for volunteers who are willing to share a personal experience related to the water problem. This takes about 15 minutes.

- **Deliberation**

The moderator introduces the first option and the participants discuss the pros and cons, costs and consequences of the option. The recorder makes notes of everyone's comments. After about 30 minutes or so, the group moves on to the second option, and after a further 30 minutes, on to the third. After each option is discussed, before moving on to the next one, the moderators asks what the group considers the consequences, impacts or trade-offs will be if they choose the option just discussed. Considering the impact of choices is a key component of the deliberative process. People begin to realise they must make choices and cannot have it all.

- **Reflection**

Drawing upon the notes taken by the recorder from the personal stake to the end of discussion on the options, the moderator asks the group to identify if and where they are able to identify common ground. This helps the group to focus on what they may agree on rather than where they disagree. Working from what the group has identified, the moderator asks the community what they are or are not willing to do to solve the problem. Although there are several people who favour the first option, by the end of the deliberation they can see that it isn't very realistic. Some were just as committed to the second and third options, but could also see the perspectives put forward by those who aren't as keen as they are.

- **Decision**

The culmination of the discussion is the decision to pursue a fourth option, which is a hybrid of approaches two and three. This results in an approach to phase out the particular chemicals and to introduce an Integrated Pest Management Strategy.

- **Action**

The forum organising committee acknowledges the decision made by the forum participants and subsequently adopts the proposal at the next council meeting. In addition, they negotiate an extended deadline with DEC that enables them to implement the solution and avoid being fined. The goal when implementing the solution is to have clean water within two years as chemicals are phased out.

While this case is just hypothetical, it illustrates the steps necessary to address contentious issues and, with public engagement, how this might be done using deliberation.

Using public deliberation forums for public engagement: Cases from Missouri

Deliberation has been used successfully in a number of public engagement projects both in the US and internationally in health care (Parkinson 2003), the environment (Booher 2004; Holmes and Scoones 2000; Webler and Tuler 1999), and community and regional planning (Goldman 2004) to name a few. Several examples will be given below where public deliberation has been used in health care, biotechnology and land use planning in Missouri, as well as a pilot project in a catchment management authority in New South Wales, Australia.

Missouri

Covering the uninsured in your community: why it is everyone's problem

In April and May 2005, 21 public deliberation forums were held around the state of Missouri to gather public input on state policy for issues related to the medically uninsured. The effort was a partnership between the State Public Policy Specialist, University of Missouri Extension, the Associate Director at the Center for Health Policy at the University of Missouri-Columbia and the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (MDHSS). The information gathered at these forums is being compiled into a policy report to present to the governor and Missouri legislature.

In October 2003, the MDHSS <<http://www.insuremissouri.org/>> was notified of their selection to receive a State Planning Grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services Administration in Washington DC. This grant program assists states to develop plans that will offer all their uninsured citizens access to affordable health insurance. With this funding over 7000 telephone household surveys, focus groups, and small business interviews were completed across the state. The data is being used to develop and evaluate a wide range of policy options to increase access to affordable health insurance coverage for Missouri residents. Called the 2004 Missouri Health Care Insurance and Access Survey, it was the largest and most comprehensive survey on health insurance ever fielded in Missouri.

Data from this survey provided valuable information to compile the discussion guide for the 21 forums. The discussion guide, *Covering the Uninsured in Your Community: Why it is Everyone's Problem*, was developed with the intent that three forums would be held in each of seven health care regions in

Missouri where local Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) operated. Two staff members from each region's AHEC office were trained to convene the public forums as they knew the local populations. Because the guide was written primarily from data collected in the state-wide survey, it was decided that the first two forums in each region would be an open-invitation to all who wished to attend and these forums would 'field test' the guide to see if it reflected public thinking. If necessary, it would be revamped from the public input and used for the remaining forums. The third forum was an invitation-only forum to people in the region who could have impact on the issue because of their positions through their businesses or other organisations and institutions.

The central question that evolved from reviewing the survey data was 'who would take responsibility for the medically uninsured?' Because there were a large number of uninsured working in small businesses, and not covered by health insurance, the first approach was framed to say the private sector was responsible. However, a large number of Missouri's small businesses cannot afford policies for their workers. Also, there was a segment that only worked as part-time who did not receive health benefits, or those who did not work at all and were uninsured. This gave rise to the question "Was it government's role to provide some type of assistance for small businesses to alleviate the pressure of paying health care benefits which would effectively put them out of business?" And, to provide for those either working part time or not at all? This led to the second approach being framed around the government taking responsibility. The third approach developed was that health care was too costly and some people go without health care because of the expense.

The public deliberation forums were facilitated by moderators trained in the deliberative process. It was during a training workshop for moderators, held to give them experience with the discussion guide, that it became evident the third approach didn't fit. Health care was costly but whenever they talked about the third approach it became more of an extension for the first two approaches. What emerged was the need for a third approach that could be built by the public. Forum participants were asked if either of the first two approaches were sufficient or did they feel the need for a third. Participants were asked what appealed to them most from the first two approaches — what did they value and what did they think would form the foundation for health care policy for the medically uninsured?

Each forum had a moderator and two recorders. All information was recorded but no names were used for attribution. Over 400 people attended the forums, all of which were held in space of less than two months. The keys to success were having data so that the issue could be framed rapidly, having a strong partnership to plan and implement the forums, having skilled conveners and moderators and recorders. Providing training for the conveners, moderators and recorders in using a deliberative process is critical for a successful forum.

The community forums resulted in a number of policy recommendations including a move towards more universal health care options, plans to enable small businesses to provide health care to their

employees and even increases in taxes to support programs that provide more access for those either working part-time, those who have lost their jobs or those unable to work. Forum participants also expressed concern that people were failing to take responsibility for their own health with such issues as smoking and obesity, which lead to chronic health problems and, in turn, impact the cost of health care.

A final policy document, with public recommendations, will be presented to the governor of Missouri and legislators in mid 2005.

Life Sciences (biotechnology) and economic development: What does the future hold in Missouri?

In Missouri, the MOBIO Commission was formed to guide the development of strategies Missouri should implement to commercialise biotechnology in all regions of the state. One of the first steps in this process was to gather public input from five diverse regions in the state as to the potential they saw for this activity in their regions. A partnership involving the Commission and the College of College of Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources at the University of Missouri-Columbia and the State Public Policy Specialist with University of Missouri Extension organised five regional two-hour public forums during the first week of April 2005.

New knowledge in the life sciences is transforming traditional approaches to medicine, food and industrial production, and environmental stewardship, with new discoveries being made by the day. Life sciences can contribute to economic growth (Kalaitzandonakes and Hodge 2005). Local economies benefit by inflows of capital, wages and purchases from local businesses. Like many other states, Missouri has shown interest in developing its life sciences sector. The question for Missouri is whether discoveries such as these will lead to products and economic opportunities. If so, how soon will this happen and which sectors of the economy would benefit the most? There is uncertainty, however, as to whether the state has the capacity and infrastructure to succeed in the future. It is a complex issue.

A discussion guide was created to assist in the public engagement process. Its structure differed somewhat from the health care discussion guide because data was not available to frame the approaches nor was it feasible in terms of time, cost and scale to bring people from all five regions together. Yet, there was a need to minimise polarisation on the issue and to move the conversation forward. This resulted in a discussion guide that was framed by focussing on two questions:

1. What did the participants see as the potential for economic development from life sciences/biotechnology for their region?
2. How should decisions be made around this issue (in other words, what process or organisational structure might communities/regions need to make decisions)?

Seven questions were used to promote deliberation and guide the discussion including whether the regions felt there was potential; what strategies might be employed to capitalise on this effort; at what

spatial scale (e.g. state, regional or local); would it be collaborative; what kind of process or organisation would be effectively to develop and support options; what was the best way to get started; who would take leadership and in what time frame; and, finally, what common ground did participants feel emerged?

A similar convening process to that used in forums on the medically uninsured (discussed above) was used in this instance.

The results were reported to the MOBIO Commission at a meeting on 9 May 9 2005. A final report is being compiled, which includes the current status of the Missouri life sciences, the findings from the forums held in the five cities, and the Commission's recommendations for stimulating the life sciences as a rural economic development engine. This report will be used to further conversation throughout the state. There is great potential for future forums in the five regions around the recommendations that emerged in five broad categories:

- Education — both formal and informal methods of increasing life sciences literacy; increasing public communications
- Public Policy — methods of technology transfer; Legislative support
- Incentives — recruitment of outside businesses; growing our own businesses
- Environment — promote a culture of entrepreneurship; identify tangible/intangible support of innovation
- Coordination — regional roles; state-wide roles.

Saline County Study Commission

In the late 1990s, there was concern in Saline County, Missouri over the potential impact of large-scale confinement animal feeding operations (CAFO) (swine) on groundwater and air pollution. This was a major challenge for county commissioners because CAFOs are regulated through the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Unless something was found amiss in the permitting process, CAFOs could not be excluded from establishing in Saline County leaving the Commissioners seeking another barrier to their establishment. One approach used by another county was the institution of a health ordinance that would regulate these entities, in terms of groundwater and air contamination, beyond permits required by EPA and DNR.

At a subsequent public meeting it was discovered, first, that not all commissioners had the same concerns about CAFOs and second, they did have concern over the legal basis for implementing this ordinance. The ordinance was put on hold while more information was sought.

The public engagement process in Saline County took place over three and a half years. After putting the health ordinance on hold, the commissioners sought assistance from University of Missouri Extension to explore the economic impact of CAFO's, stressing the need for 'knowledge-based'

decision-making in regard to the potential for such development. The scope of the knowledge was narrow, focussing on economic impact, with university faculty deciding what knowledge was relevant. Core issues, such as impact on the cultural and historical assets in the county, and personal and property rights, were not going to be addressed (Powers and Pettersen 2001). This decision erupted into controversy with a number of state-wide groups, including conservation and sustainable agriculture interests, questioning the agenda of experts and voicing their opposition to this approach.

Shortly thereafter, University Missouri Extension withdrew leadership from the project, placing the responsibility for the process in the hands of Saline County. The people in Saline County would drive the process and be active co-learners throughout. They would involve the 'experts' when they felt it was warranted. Once the commissioners became comfortable with control of the process, rapid progress was made. A twelve-member Study Commission was chosen locally by the Saline County Commissioners. Different perspectives were represented with gender, geographic and occupational diversity. Members had one-year terms but could renew. It was self-organised and self-directed. This Study Commission guided the process. People on the commission were committed to the process, with most attending more than 58 per cent of the 38 meetings. Everything that happened was publicly recorded and a web page kept citizens informed. A great number of Saline County residents learned computer skills as a result of accessing the web page for information. The local media was involved and reported on all meetings.

Once the study was completed a draft issue book was prepared, which framed the problem and proposed several approaches to addressing the problem of CAFOs and the health ordinance. County residents participated in the framing of the approaches. The issue book was then 'field tested' throughout the county with 17 public forums attended by over 200 people. Each forum had a moderator and a recorder and the notes from each forum were recorded on the community website. The local newspaper attended almost every forum and at least one member of the Study Commission attended each forum. Comments of participants were incorporated into the final recommendations.

The results from the forums were surprising. The whole process revealed much deeper concerns from the citizens than just passing a health ordinance to deter CAFOs. The following were themes that resulted from the public deliberation forums:

- We care about the future of our county
- We are concerned about more regulations
- We want to be able to vote on any proposed regulations
- We would like to plan our future and not just 'let it happen'.

People realised the critical issue was the future of Saline County's natural resource base, and CAFOs were just a part of this. A final issue book was prepared in February 2000 called *A Saline County Study: Balancing Our Heritage with Our Horizon*, which focussed on land use in the county. It has been used by Saline County in its land use planning efforts.

“Recommendation to the Saline County Commission Regarding Land Use and Future Development in Saline County from the Citizen Steering Committee of the Saline County Study” <<http://saline.missouri.edu/documents/recommendation/recommendation.htm>> was presented on 30 August 2000 and included:

1. Initiating a Master Land Use plan for the county that would be open to the public
2. Implementing a “Good Neighbor Policy that would set the procedures under which neighbors living within the county, and outside of city jurisdictions, would voluntarily notify surrounding neighbors in advance of his/her action to change land usage in a way that could adversely affect neighbors. The county’s master plan would specify the particular zone (or zones) within which the land uses would be subject to the Good Neighbor Policy. The Good Neighbor Policy should invoke a fair waiting period, after notification, for neighbors to ask questions or to request the assistance of a member of the county’s mediation panel. Such mediator would be chosen based on the mutual agreement of the parties” <<http://saline.missouri.edu/documents/recommendation/recommendation.htm#GNP>>
3. Rejecting the adoption of a county health ordinance to regulate concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) at this time due to a pending court case in another county.

There were several unanticipated impacts that resulted from this public engagement process that have built the community’s capacity to engage in public processes. Many of Saline County’s residents learned computer skills through their desire to access information and/or participate by email. A number of community members learned to moderate public deliberation forums and continue to use these skills with other issues today. In fact, the forum process has spread to surrounding counties. And a Leadership Initiative through Fellowship and Education (L.I.F.E.) program was created to disseminate information and research from the Saline County Study, stimulate community discussion, shape county decision-making and strengthen the Saline County network of Leaders.

The potential for use of deliberation in a catchment management area, New South Wales: A proposed pilot project

Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) are the outcome to regionalise governance of natural resource in New South Wales. These authorities have their origins in studies undertaken in the United States (e.g. Morton 2003) which found that government regulation, technical expertise and public tax dollars were insufficient to solve water quality issues involving agricultural runoff and other rural community land use practices. Land and Water Australia (July 2001) also identified that successful NRM in Australia depended upon engaging a wider range of stakeholders and that NRM problems cannot be considered independently of other dimensions, particularly social. Regionalisation is assumed to provide better outcomes as it allows for: regions with geographical boundaries rather than historical or political boundaries; greater community participation in developing plans rather governmental ‘top-down’ policy processes; and better identification and coordination of local issues (Bell 2004).

Indeed, community consultation has long been a policy and legislative requirement for decision-making in natural resource management (NRM), particularly within the regional governance model. However, Lane et al. (2004) identified at least four key areas of concern with the regional governance model. These were:

1. Difficulty in defining the region
2. Power, conflict and community
3. Lack of clear accountability for achieving improved outcomes
4. Tensions between technocrats (scientific experts) and community members (democracy). Thus, merely bringing local interest groups together does not guarantee outcomes that are sound or widely accepted. Some community groups have spent years debating issues from the position of competing interests, leading to polarised stances or stalemates. In other instances consultative processes have been seen to fail because participants were unwilling to make decisions that would impinge on short-term interests. These groups were rarely offered alternative approaches to settling the complex, difficult issues they faced in moving effectively from planning to implementation.

It is apparent therefore that all stakeholders need to be part of the process in identifying solutions to water problems. What is needed is a community-led model that leads individuals to share as a group in ownership of the problems, addresses Lane's (2004) concerns over power, conflict, community and technocracy, overcomes the separateness between the social and physical sciences as a barrier to effective NRM (Land and Water Australia 2001, p. 5) and moves towards action in resolution of the problem. Public deliberation is one such community-led model and offers a thorough, comprehensive methodology that a CMA can apply to the problematic tasks of multi-stakeholder decision-making to move more effectively from planning to implementation. The public deliberation process supports best practice in public engagement by providing the CMA with an effective format and structured method for engaging the public in decision-making. It also includes an inbuilt auditing trail that ensures the process is fully documented with the use of moderators and recorders at each forum. Part 1, 'Objects of the Act', clause 3(e) of the *Catchment Management Authorities Act 2003* stated "to involve communities in each catchment in decision making and to make best use of catchment knowledge and expertise". Public deliberation supports this objective by acknowledging that all stakeholders have knowledge and expertise to contribute and encouraging them to share these resources as they work through the decision-making process. Based on these premises, a proposal was put to a CMA that manages natural resource management in catchment areas of New South Wales, Australia. This proposal involved a small-scale pilot of a public deliberation forum. Undertaking this pilot would enable the CMA to make an informed decision regarding the Charles Sturt University (CSU) proposal to use the public deliberation process on more critical catchment scale issues.

The expected outcomes of this proposal were:

- 1) The CMA will make a commitment to the funds and time required to conduct a pilot deliberative forum
- 2) The CMA will identify a subcommittee to liaise with the CSU Public Deliberation Project Team
- 3) The CMA, in partnership with the CSU team will identify a 'real life' issue/topic to be used as a basis for the pilot.

In order for the process to be successful the CMA must decide on the level of authority it is willing to delegate on a particular issue and clearly communicate that judgment to participants. Under the CMA legislation the CMA Board has ultimate responsibility for the decisions made. However, in order to increase trust in the CMA and increase community engagement, the public must have confidence that their input will make a difference.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to generate discussion and raise awareness about the role deliberation, and public deliberative forums can play in the public engagement process. While deliberation is not a cure-all, it can make a significant difference in increasing public participation in identifying issues, developing an approach to discuss the issues, planning for action and decision-making. Deliberation can take into account the wide variety of concerns, expectations and understandings about an issue while bridging the divide, which often occurs between communities and agencies or other institutions responsible for public engagement. It creates a venue for people to explore common ground and the impacts and consequences of their choices. The practice of deliberation forums is well established in the United States. Although in its infancy in Australia, there are encouraging signs that the deliberative process is being used in various local and state governments departments. Potential exists for the use of deliberation in natural resource management to make significant contributions towards decreasing polarisation and increasing public input into policy that impacts people's lives.

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