FINDING THE GAPS; INTERROGATING THE DISCOURSE OF WHO CARES FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AS DESIGNED BY POLICY WRITERS AND EXPERIENCED BY THE DO-ERS ... THE GROUP.

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THIS THESIS IS PRESENTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY OF MURDOCH UNIVERSITY, 2016.
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has been edited following initial review by examiners and has now been re-submitted for review and examination.

This work has not been submitted for any other degree at any other tertiary institution.

I also declare that the requisite ethics applications were made and approved.

Sally Paulin

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28 November 2016
Finding the gaps; interrogating the discourse of who cares for the environment as designed by the policy writers and experienced by the do-ers...the group.

This thesis traces the outcomes of some of the environmental legislation and government programs initiated in Australia under the Natural Heritage Trust between 2003 and 2008 as they were experienced by the community – the do-ers. This story is told from the perspective of the group and highlights the implications for community groups of ever-changing government priorities, policies and funding models. It highlights the issue of concerting community/bureaucratic relations and identifies a gap between what was designed by the policy writers and what actually happened on the ground.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis has come to fruition in a journey over more than ten years of fits and starts and much learning about myself, the world, experiencing wonderful teaching opportunities, great conversations and the love and support of many people.

I want to pay tribute to my colleagues and many friends at Murdoch: in the old ISTP – the Institute for Saving the Planet, and my original supervisor, Laura Stocker who lead me through the various pathways of ‘doing’; and, then, in our School of Sustainability where we worked and learned together with such great spirit and camaraderie – thanks to Allan Johnstone, Brad Pettitt, Nicole Hodgson, John Davis, Ian Barns, Peter McMahon, Peter Devereux, Glenn Albrecht, Subas Dhakal, Lynda Braddick, Kendal Hodgman and later Rochelle Spencer and many other friends and students for always …very carefully … challenging and encouraging me – poking their head around the door with a quizzical comment about ‘the thesis’…

Doing research, teaching and writing people’s stories is often about being in the right place at the right time and meeting special people; like Michael Booth, a beautiful, gentle and intelligent man who amazed me when he asked me to take on his teaching about exploring the self and sustainability when he fell sick and, very sadly, soon after passed away; and whose lectures I still have on a CD, ready to listen to again one day – about holons and mobius strips and psychology, ecology and the environment; like the late Joan Eveline, Michael’s wife, who introduced me to Dorothy Smith that semester at UWA, whose work I learned and taught as I went and which struck such a chord with what I wanted to do with this work.

Special thanks too to all the people who were part of my research conversations, my respondents who spoke to me and shared their thoughts and concerns with such generosity and patience; who worked with and were members of the group. Without you there would be no story.

More recently, my supervisors, Martin Brueckner and Davina Boyd have shown great patience, care and respect. They have given much good feedback and have been willing for me to ‘just write it then’ in the way I wanted even when this tested their understandings of a thesis. Megan Paull has been a good friend, supporter, research partner into volunteering and homelessness and generally wonderful encourager and occasional bringer down to earth. Many thanks to all of you for sticking with me to the end.

No PhD student can ever do it on their own and my greatest thanks go to my long suffering family who have lived this task for the last 13 years; my ever-supportive husband, Tony, who carefully vacuumed around all the piles on the lounge floor and faithfully helped me pack and repack as we moved house … now five times; who hopefully wrote on the Christmas letters that I would finish soon, next year… or, perhaps, the next … and who has shown immense patience, love and understanding when my head was elsewhere much of the time. To our beautiful children, Jessica and Samuel who have grown from teenagers to adults over the past 13 years and who just as carefully put the piles to one side so they could have parties when we were away and put them back afterwards and never failed to believe I could do this even when I didn’t myself…sometimes. We will have a celebratory ripping up of what is left of the piles, there are fire bans in place now!

I would also like to thank my original examiners for their feedback, honest critique and suggestions which have resulted in re-editing and some tightening up of this work for further review.

Sally Paulin

Fremantle, 28 November 2016
**GLOSSARY**

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<tr>
<td>BVP/TRCG</td>
<td>The Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>CALM</td>
<td>Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management (now known as Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW))</td>
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<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>Institutional ethnography</td>
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<tr>
<td>MBI</td>
<td>Market based instrument</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-government organisation</td>
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<td>NHT</td>
<td>Natural Heritage Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>NHT1, NHT2, NHT3</td>
<td>Natural Heritage Trust funding rounds.</td>
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<td>NRM</td>
<td>Natural Resource Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRA</td>
<td>Participatory Rural Appraisal</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCC</td>
<td>Swan Catchment Centre, then Swan Catchment Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCULP</td>
<td>Swan Canning Urban Landcare Program</td>
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<td>SCUUP</td>
<td>Swan Canning Clean-up Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>SERCUL</td>
<td>South East Region Urban Landcare</td>
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION - BACK TO THE FUTURE

I first became aware of ‘the catchment group’ when I saw an advert in the local paper about Learning Circles and an opportunity to join one to learn about the Swan River in Perth. I went along and met a range of people who all spoke about the river in personal ways, about how some of them experienced it as children or like me, walking my dog and kids or biking on the paths alongside it and why they felt they wanted to do something to preserve it for the future. It was a simple afternoon of fellowship and sharing our connection to place, and some of us pledged to follow up on the notions we had put together to move from thinking about it to action. I can’t remember what my plan was now but remember feeling that this was a group I could belong to, to make some new friends and do something worthwhile. I put my name down to join the email list and went home.

Then I got a phone call, would I go to Point Walter and join a small group to demonstrate a learning circle for a video, yes, why not, something different I thought. Again a small group of mainly students who knew each other, an indigenous man who told us the stories of the place – how it was a women’s place and that the young men would swim across the current from the end of the spit to the other side of the river. I remember him telling us and feeling that this helped to connect my being there with the place. It satisfied momentarily my yearning for a history in this town that was only 150 or so years old.

Later I responded to a call to assist the group’s coordinator with writing a funding application. She worked in a tiny cubby hole at the Swan River Trust on the river foreshore, just big enough for her desk and chair. She worked part time and her desk was piled high. Another couple of volunteers – students - were there too and we chatted about what the funding would be used for - painting fish on drain covers, I think and perhaps doing workshops in schools – and how it could be accounted for - but who would do it, volunteers? I contributed my ideas and later wrote up a small section and sent it back to join the larger draft. I wondered about the value of painting fish on drain covers.
Another time I saw an advert on the catchment group email for a workshop on Giving Great School Presentations – I applied and went along – again great learning and good people – a fun day. I was a Mum with two kids at primary school. I was a mature student fitting in study with childrearing. I was doing something that I had planned to do at 18 but hadn’t passed the tests… interesting now to realise that I am following my original desire to find out how what people say turns into action – linguistics, French and Italian was the original challenge which has morphed into what is known as social sustainability …and power …and rationality. Now, the system allowed me to belong, to learn, to situate myself in a different space from that of secretary, someone’s office girl, maker of tea, baker of cakes and writer of parents and friends newsletters. I was learning about how people learn and then learning from sitting and doing in my own children’s classrooms about collaboration, group work and learning styles and how power happens; ‘helping’ kids with learning difficulties or how to know it wasn’t just that you stuffed up – sometimes they just weren’t ready to learn that day. To think about how you say things to ‘encourage’ them and how the words you choose and the way you say them frames the moment and the response. How, sometimes, in your mind’s eye, you remember them ‘misbehaving’ in a pizza place and wondering why their mothers just let them do it, whose concept of ‘misbehaving’ was I judging with and giving power to? While, at the same time, you are talking with them to help them ‘learn’ – who is learning? How did what I was ‘thinking’ and ‘saying’ combine to antagonise them, their responses cocky, defensive. Frustrated and yes, on occasion, angry and hurt when one said something nasty to me on the basketball court – this was their territory, this was what they could do and I didn’t know the rules there, but I had power over them - or did I just think I did?

I luxuriated in my learning, my second life away filtered from my husband and 2.0 kids. I could listen to Radio National and understand the conversations – that is what paradigm means – I couldn’t get my head around it in class that day before. I was starting to learn a new language, a new jargon. I had to remember to speak differently depending on who I was with. My uni friends thought I was brainy and knew what I was talking about and that I found writing was easy, they asked me for help and advice, they believed in me, expert, I didn’t often, always, when would they find me out? My husband believed in me and supported me and took the kids out for
the day when an often late essay took over our weekend time – his actions spoke their worth and were much appreciated. They cheered for me when I graduated and they made it special, it was their achievement too. When I wrote a book, he told his friends and workmates – proud I was his wife – their interest and congratulations reflected his felt, some even bought a copy. I still have to remind myself about the power of words. I feel powerful when I am talking about what I know - liberated and strong and energetic - pulling back when I see blank faces; they don’t know the same ‘know’ that I do, but they have different ‘knows’ that I don’t share too.

I wrote a book about a group of friends (Paulin, 2002), farmers who had devoted their lives to their special places, who, they felt had been framed as cranks by people who didn’t understand. They came to the launch to celebrate that someone had listened and had written their stories - their point of view - validated that a serving politician was interested enough to launch their lives in print.

How does the power of words and knowing frame our experience of life and love and work? How do the power-full write and use words like ‘community’ and ‘capacity building’ and ‘volunteers’? Who are they talking about? Do they picture these words as people or as words that make you feel powerful as you write them in your policy, speak them in your speech? Do they understand the great complexity of doing what they have written on the white pages? The long chains of interpreting and re-interpreting what the thoughts transposed onto the paper mean; like Chinese Whispers, the intentions change with every re-use. Whose voice is speaking power in the way they use those words to give messages to others who they have identified as the people to do those words - and so on down the chain to the end - the community - the volunteers - the group - us?

This story is about those people at the end, the catchment group and the volunteers; about how they experienced the words writ large upon the white paper. How their everyday lived experience of volunteering, working with and being a community and caring for their special places was influenced by the words, transmitted down

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1 The use of the term ‘power-full’ in several places throughout this thesis is deliberate and is used to further emphasise the gaps that exist between the designers and writers and approvers of government policy and those who experience it and, in the case of the group, are expected to operationalise it – the do-ers.
through the whispers and the frames of knowing and (mis)understanding and ongoing change.

After a long time, I have just now found my own voice again; but I know too that I want this to be the story of the people I am writing about. When I wrote another book with several people contributing their stories (Paulin, 2006) it was because I knew how to do it, had the passion to make it happen and convince others to join with me and share their stories and, so that I could see it on the shelf at the bookshop, looking around with my daughter, scanning the customers and sneaking a photo of my name in print with my mobile phone so I could be part of that club of people who had written books, a writer. It was only later that shy knocks at my office door told me how much they had enjoyed the writing, the storytelling, my way of helping other people’s stories and writing to fit together on the pages. I learned that this creation was being used in courses at our university – simple stories with messages everyone can understand. A reviewer described it as ‘deceptively simple’ (Alessandrini, 2007) she said the writing had drawn her in as if she was reading a storybook and then she realised the power of the diverse stories told just so.

When I started this whole PhD process I had such vast ideas about what the end result would be. This was culled and twisted, rethought and reformatted many times. The topic wasn’t mine originally, suggested to me by a supervisor anxious to install boundaries and do-able-ness. I chose the catchment group because I knew them from my past experience. I spoke to people in the group, I surveyed others and I listened to their experience - their reactions to the process, the requirements, the words. I was not a master of any particular theory; I wanted to tell their experience. I didn’t know what there was to know until I asked and observed and made connections. I started to think about how to research and how to write it and what it would speak. And then, I had a revelation.

I went to teach at another university and the coordinator decided at the last minute that we would change the whole unit to incorporate the ideas and methods of a guest academic visiting the university and giving workshops that semester – Dorothy Smith (1987; 2007). And so I channelled my French teacher at secretarial college – a quirky Frenchman who immersed us in French to the point where speaking English didn’t come naturally for us and, at the same time, he learned our Spanish lessons at
night and delivered them to us the next day. English women learning Spanish with a French accent … taking us to different thought places, silent reading, thinking with an accent, many accents and learning that the more we knew about language the easier it was to learn more, to understand the structures and the power of another, the other. How it is hard to just translate a sentence from one language to another without applying the rules and nuances of the second and losing some of the meaning of the first. Luxuriating when watching a foreign language film at the cinema or watching Inspector Rex, listening to the language and the patterns and hearing and noting and wondering what the subtitles miss in translation. Or sitting on a bus and listening to conversations in another language, private nosiness as the speakers are unaware you know too. Or speaking sustainability when re-presenting the views of farmers to scientists, who didn’t understand me, and who questioned why farmers found it so difficult to talk with them, not understanding that the farmers didn’t speak their brand of science (Paulin, 2010). My farming friends questioned what they wrote and whether they would be able to understand what I wrote for them, querying, understanding that knowledge is power yet thinking it has to be so much more difficult than just to write it simply on the page. I, in turn, know that they know much more than I do.

So, I helped the classes to map their bus rides, to read the texts and notice the rules that made them good passengers – did they tag off? Did they give up their seat to someone frail, disabled, as the notice said or did they just keep sitting, unaware or knowing yet not doing? I asked them to look at their workplaces to see where and how power and texts organised their lives. At first they were blissfully unaware, thought that discrimination no longer happened, battles had been fought, bras had been burnt and won and now feminism wasn’t important any more – they were OK. But little by little, their study partners showed them their work experiences by observing and writing about what they saw and how it happened to them and, little by little, they realised the power of words which created structures which dictated how they worked - the sales quota targets on the tea room noticeboard - who could come and who could go. They were surprised at first, but then they understood and their knowing grew to seeing and noticing and reading - for the times in the future when they would need to see.
I listened to Dorothy Smith and others speak about her work and how it could be used to uncover social relations and at her PhD thesis workshop, I presented what I knew and had seen about the group and Dorothy Smith said “this is important…why don’t you just write it then”? This institutional ethnography was a coming home place for me – a way to tell people’s experiences and to try to make plain the structures which enveloped them.

Elated I went away to ‘just write it then’ but, then, got stuck again in other peoples’ voices, their words taking away my power to express in my voice; gave me another excuse to not just write it - then. But now, after several years of teaching and journeying through research and life, I have come back to ‘just write it’ in my own way, to finish it and to hope that by reading it other people will see what I saw. After all, this story, this research, this writing, is only my seeing of it. There may be other ways of seeing that I have not seen or made note of and this writing is not meant to be exhaustive – just another step in understanding some of the things that I saw and making them visible.

My contribution in writing this work is to explore how ‘the catchment group’ I chose to write about – the community, the volunteers and those who support them who are sandwiched between the policy makers and the people - experienced the limits of what they were concerted to do by the more power-full structures which bounded their ability to care for the environment on a local scale. This contribution will shed some light on the liminal space of relationships and partnerships between government and community organisations and provide some understanding of how these might happen better in the future.

I will use some of the tools of Dorothy Smith’s institutional ethnography to take the ball of string and gradually unwind it so that you come to view the bigger picture and the questions that it raises (DeVault & McCoy, 2002). I will also use the work of Bent Flyvbjerg (1998) who speaks about phronesis or ‘practical wisdom’ and the relationship between rationality and power.

I do not have the answers to all of the questions and suggest that this writing will contribute to future conversations about how these relationships which cross
boundaries between public and private, government and citizen can be mobilised more usefully in the future. Can the government really legislate for us to care?

STRUCTURE – WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Figure 1.1: Thesis Structure

In order to tell you what I have come to know, in Chapter 2 I have set the context, the scene of the research, some of what I needed to see in order to start to know the story. I will expand on the overarching idea of interdisciplinarity and sustainability; the connectedness of what many view as their whole. I will write about some of what was written or transmitted in government policy on the environment, how the bureaucrats described ‘the community’ and, particularly, I will tell you about their instrument, the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT), its various iterations of funding and the strategies and activities of the Catchment Council, government’s link to the catchment group (the group), the do-ers, the community. This research covers a period between 2003-2008, deliberately a snapshot in time, and is intended to show just a small example of what was experienced on a much broader scale across the Australia.

In Chapter 3, I uncover and explicate just what is Institutional Ethnography, how it works and why it and some other theories or ways of seeing and doing like rationality and phronesis resonated for my story. I tell you more about ‘the group’, detail how I discovered the ‘problematic’ and how it became clear and visible so I
could use it to understand what happened and what the implications were. The methodology I used to gather information will be explained. This is almost a detective story putting together the scene for the reader to unravel it, thinking you understand, you know why and then seeing that - no it didn’t turn out that way - there was a gap, something that was hidden that suddenly became clear.

In Chapter 4, I elaborate more on the big picture of the Natural Heritage Trust and government policy market-based instruments, its reviews and some of its perceived shortcomings. This is, of necessity, only partly a list of things that happened over the period of my listening and reading about this work and is not exhaustive. I have chosen only to write about the issues which had some immediate bearing on the experience of the group.

In Chapter 5, I set out the experiences and reflections of some of the community members, volunteers, and the coordinators of the catchment group and their peers, all told through interviews, texts and rememberings and (mis)understandings. A chance to piece together the narrative, sometimes chronological, sometimes someone’s thoughts - who said what and what they did next and who was heard and who wasn’t and why?

Chapter 6 will draw all these frames or episodes together to make some sense of them, setting out some answers to the problematic and highlighting the gaps. It situates the research findings in the broader context of the policy cycle, what it means to be a community, how relationships are reliant on trust and reciprocity and the difficulties and outcomes of combining policy with community delivery, by referring to the current research and also other relevant examples.

In Chapter 7, the Conclusion, I will draw together the threads again to describe how the framing of community action through creating a dependence on government funding and its attendant bureaucracy does the community a dis-service by ‘calcifying’ the process and how the ‘do-ers’ experienced this?

As this is a reviewed and re-edited version of work that was written over a period of ten or more years, I will also briefly review what has happened in recent times in the region to see if anything has changed.
The aim of this research is to illustrate what happened to the group in the context of government policy and the various changes and iterations that occurred to their experience during the period of the research. In a time when neoliberal processes continue to govern, influence and define how and what we can do as a community, in the shadows of the free market, to address what we see happening to the environment that we are part of, this aim of this thesis is to go some way to highlight the actual experience.

This narrative is not exhaustive. There are many ways of seeing and doing and experiences from other writers, people and places that may have contributed to understanding the bigger picture which may not be talked about here. By following the method and methodology of institutional ethnography combined with phronesis, this is the particular community’s experience that I have heard and have to tell.

And then, it will have been ‘just written’ and you can read it and readers will see some similarities with their experiences and perhaps change might happen next, or not, but their eyes may have cleared for an instant, enough to know and see for themselves.
CHAPTER 2: THE CONTEXT

This thesis looks at how an urban community environmental group (the do-ers) experienced the concept of ‘community delivery’ used by the policy writers to design the Natural Heritage Trust and environmental policy in Western Australia during the period 2003-2008. The lens through which I look is the social organisation of knowledge first developed by Dorothy Smith (1987), known as institutional ethnography (IE), and the work of Bent Flyvbjerg (1998, Flyvbjerg et al, 2012) in examining power, rationality and through the concept of *phronesis* or practical wisdom.

The focus of this writing is on urban community groups working in the environmental sector during the years between 2003 and 2008, with the case study detailing the experience of a small urban community catchment group in Western Australia. It is therefore a snapshot of that period. That said, the not for profit community service sector continues to face similar disruptions and changes over this period to today and their experience has many corollaries with what I have found.

Over the same time, governments, both state and federal, devolved more community service delivery across the board to the non-profit sector as this sector appeared to be ‘cheaper and more efficient’ than government agencies (see Ohlin 1998 for background) due to lower wages and heavy reliance on volunteers to deliver services. Non-profits were also considered to be more readily adaptable to changes in delivery or direction than more cumbersome government agencies. This was a government view from-above and not from within the non-profit or community benefit sector which used limited resources to provide support to some wicked social problems in the community and often struggled with delivery and mission drift. In response, in 2011, the West Australian Government introduced the ‘Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy’ (DCSPP) (WA Government, 2011) in an attempt to regularise outcome reporting across the community service sector with “outcomes-based procurement reform … focused on funding community sector programs on the basis of achieving better outcomes” (Flatau, Zaretsky et al, 2015
p4), with some leeway in the policy recognising the complexity of measuring outcomes in some instances. The move to outcome reporting on funding for community organisations in WA in 2011 is a complex area given the broad sweep of services they offer and clients they serve, and, as Flatau, Zaretsky et al (2015) suggest:

The true test of service effectiveness is not the actual movement in the outcome indicators employed but the movement relative to the counterfactual or what would have happened in the absence of the program (6).

The state government has thus leveraged its power to fund against delivery of measurable outcomes (Flatau, Zaretsky et al, 2015) and has also encouraged non-profits to diversify their income streams to become self-funding through social enterprise and innovation (Muir & Parker, 2004). Social impact studies are currently underway (Flatau, Zaretsky et al, 2015) to identify ways in which the community service sector can more easily measure outcomes for impact in order to respond to the WA government’s position.

This is important as it encapsulates the issues of funding non-profits to deliver community services while changing the goalposts on a regular basis which has been the experience in the environmental community sector.

In the context of this thesis, a key tenet in the design of the federal government’s original Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) funding (2001), though a little lost in the process and the passage of time, was that the funding made available to community organisations was designed to serve only as initial or seed funding to assist environment groups to set up community based programs in the form of a trampoline rather than a hammock (Cote, 2002). However, given the difficulty in finding alternative funding streams, NHT and other state and federal government environmental programs quickly became the major source of ongoing funding for all levels of the environment sector and was sorely missed once the NHT ceased to exist, especially in states like Western Australia where regional catchment councils were essentially non-profits and had no statutory income (Pannell et al, 2008; Vella et al, 2015).
As a parallel, the ‘Big Society’, a ‘big (political) idea’ promoted by David Cameron in the United Kingdom in the 2010 general election later infiltrated political speak in Australia (Whelan, 2012). Badged as rebuilding British community spirit to its past glory through communities taking back responsibility for local service delivery and caring for each other, the Big Society is another example of devolving agency to the ‘community’ without necessarily understanding what or who that ‘community’ is and whether or not they are capable of that task (Bartels et al, 2012; Slocock, 2013). Some commentators queried the rhetoric and contend that this policy is actually just a way to cut government costs and put the onus for service delivery on an as yet poorly defined and unskilled ‘community’. There will be some communities that have good social capital, community awareness and capabilities who will take on the tasks envisaged; those communities with many joiners and leaders and do-ers; but communities that lack these qualities and have always suffered from unemployment and social problems, will continue to do so, particularly if government imposes more top down ‘volunteering’ requirements and community activities. It’s almost a reflex action of stepping away from ‘outside’ organisation, when government ignores or misunderstands what exists already (Bartels et al, 2012). The do-ers in these communities may just walk away and rue the intrusion of government in their lives, while the mobile middling classes eat, root and leave when new opportunities arise. Their connection to their roots is stretched by attachment to career and greener pastures and they are not limited by ‘the way we have always done things here’ (Paulin, 2006; Wrong, 1976). Bartels et al (2012) found that employed and higher educated people will weigh up the benefits before they choose to volunteer, as they want to know that their efforts will be worthwhile and as an indication of success, they are less likely to consider committing their time when government funding for projects is decreased or unavailable.

Without ‘community’ and volunteer input, many services would never happen due to prohibitive costs that would prevent government or business taking on delivery instead (Swan Catchment Council, 2002). To put this in context, 38% of the Australian population aged over 18 years (6.4 million people) took part in formal volunteering in 2010 (approximately 714 million hours at an estimated value of $14.6 billion per year) (Productivity Commission, 2010). A large proportion of this volunteering took place in the community support sector working for not-for-profits
(or what could better be called ‘community benefit organisations’ (Gottlieb, 2008)) and organised volunteering agencies who were government funded for social service delivery. However, in response to changed economic conditions and other factors, a 2014 General Social Survey (ABS) found that volunteering activity across Australia fell to 31% (ABS, 2014). The ABS (2014) also noted that this correlated with their 2013 Measures of Australia’s Progress data “showing a decrease in the time and opportunity that Australians have for recreation and leisure, and social and community interaction” (17). The ABS (2014) summary also links volunteering and community participation to the community’s levels of social capital, trust and reciprocity (see Chapter 6 for more discussion).

Thus, looking through an IE lens, this work is a reflection on how government created a service delivery model to address environmental degradation which depended on a willing community to act, yet succeeded mainly in delivering institutional isomorphism (Di Maggio & Powell, 1983) or community environmental organisations that became models or imitators of the bureaucracy that dictated what and how they could do (Eversole, 2011). While this thesis covers only a finite period of 2003-2008, it does serve as a useful reflection on how this occurred especially from the perspective of the community group.

The intangible question of what relevance the activities of environmental community groups and the structures they exist within have had in changing or developing ‘community’ awareness about the environment and sustainability in general is a challenging one and I cannot address this fully here. That is for another time and place and realising this has made a useful bounding of what will and won’t be spoken about here.

I will not be presenting a comprehensive review of a particular system or train of thought – rather I will dip into a wide range of voices from here and there in the tradition of interdisciplinarity and phronetic research to review and analyse the ideas and experiences raised by this research.

Using the tools of IE, I will trace how volunteers and community are described or implicated in relevant government and agency policy documents; based on in depth interviews with participants, attendance at group committee meetings and a survey, I
will describe how they talk about their actual experience either as members of an urban environmental community group or as an employee of the group.

But first to further set out the context, I need to go back a step or two to think about how government policy happens, where the power is and how it is used.

**RATIONALITY AND GOVERNMENTALITY – FRAMING THE THEORY AROUND POWER**

I have come to realize that when I speak about government policy and how it works, issues of power, transparency and evaluative effectiveness will be major considerations. Governments exercise power through developing policy which is policed by regulation and funding controls (Davis et al, 1988, 1990). However, actual policy follow-through is often lacking or patchy, especially when dealing with unknown ‘real world’ players and do-ers, such as community groups or the environment itself (Dale, 2001). Programs are usually short term to address anxiety, real or imagined, and are regularly superseded by newer attempts to address the same issue or just quietly forgotten. Bureaucratic memories are short and wheels are regularly re-invented. Government policy is, after all, at its most cynical, a political reaction to the recognition of a problem or issue that attracts public attention (Thomas, 2005). Government bureaucracies are not generally recognized for their innovation but rather for developing programs which address symptoms rather than causes (Dale, 2001; Turner & Wynne, 1992). In this context too, I understand that bureaucracies may usurp rationality as necessary to achieve measurable aims; policy is implemented and evaluated in a very short turnaround and thus the process is often confined to ticking boxes of things that can be shown to have been done within the time frame – tick, done! (Davis et al, 1988, 1990; Eversole, 2011, Vella et al, 2015, Tennant & Lockie, 2013b) (See Chapter 6 for more discussion). The long term ‘on the ground’ outcomes that the Decade of Landcare and Natural Heritage Trust policy were initially designed to address need time to evolve and become visible and may well be intangible or more difficult to measure than the number of focus groups held or kilometres of fencing installed (Eversole, 2011). They may also be more difficult to manage. Flyvbjerg has previously exposed the relationship between rationality and power and suggested that rather than being “constant over time and place” as the Enlightenment tradition would see it, “rationality is context dependent
and that the context of rationality is power” (1998, 2). Through his description of a planning process in Aalborg, Flyvbjerg demonstrates that, in practice, “power blurs the dividing line between rationality and rationalization” (1998, 97) and that, when powerful actors require rationalization and not rationality, the rationalization is miraculously produced. The freedom to interpret and use “rationality’ and “rationalization” in the service of power is a key element in enabling power to define reality (1998, 98).

Flyvbjerg favours what he calls the ‘intellectual tradition’ of Thucydides and Machiavelli and their “insight that reasoning quickly turns into rationalization and that dialogue becomes persuasive rhetoric under the pressures of reality” (1998, 5). He goes on to suggest that Nietzsche and Foucault have taken up Machiavelli’s concept of “power as ‘strategies and tactics’ exercised in more subtle ways” (1998, 5). Power is not always visible but it is always there. Given the fluidity that exists between rationality and rationalization in the ‘real’ exercise of power, Flyvbjerg coined the concept of “Realrationalität” and contended that “distinguishing between formal rationality and Realrationalität is as important to the understanding of modernity and of modern politics, administration and planning as the distinction between politics and Realpolitik” (1998, 6).

This Realrationalität may also distort the ability to achieve more sustainable solutions to everyday modern problems and pragmatism creates a particular form of reality to maintain control while paying lip service to, what may seem to some, the utopian idyll of creating a responsive and responsible community (see Hendricks et al, 2008). The balance between power and love is easily unbalanced yet it is through developing the self-actualization of the power-full that will allow them to see that others – the community - can exercise love and power too ... maybe in different ways but in many cases no less usefully (Kahane, 2010); relationally as opposed to via regulation (Muir & Parker, 2014).

The broader wholistic understandings that are created by the concept of sustainability provide a framework for talking about alternative viewpoints and competing interests and rationalities – economic, environmental, social and, sometimes, spiritual. It also illustrates the complexity of making good decisions and
designing good policy (Head, 2008). Complete and achievable answers are rare, wicked problems much more common. Reacting to a commentator who suggested that Agenda 21 and sustainable development ran counter to the American ethos of universal freedom, Porritt described sustainable development as “not some boring catch-phrase for sad gits with nothing better to do with their lives, but a rumbustious, ideologically charged ‘big idea’” which he suggested should be “the central organizing principle for the whole of government” (Porritt, 2007, np)

For some, initially, sustainability was linked only to ‘the environment’ and the connections between the economy and the social were silent. There are many different ways of describing the sustainability ‘big idea’ and the social sustainability frame or angle is vital to making it work (Bostrom, 2012). As Dovers (2000) suggested the people are vital - the social frame - especially in the context of looking after the environment – the do-ers. Paulin (2006) highlighted the need for people to see things through a sustainability lens, in particular, the often fractious relations between the economy and the environment, in so doing revealing and requiring development of their knowledge of self and their relationship to address issues.

Applying this social sustainability or ‘people’ frame to the Natural Resource Management (NRM) sector highlighted the need for effective community deliberation and engagement in planning and project design, involvement in decision making, designing actions and activities and the consequent need for responsibility taking and actually doing it (Lockie, 2004; Tennant & Lockie, 2013b).

Again, the question of who was deliberating and deciding was dependent upon which parts of the ‘community’ were represented in any NRM discussion. There were multiple layers in the NRM/NHT network and, over the period under study, a complex web of participants and organisations were included and, on occasion, later excluded which led to communication and implementation difficulties and at the lower levels, a feeling of being unheard (see for example Tennant & Lockie, 2013b; Vella et al 2015). As Humphreys (2009) suggests:

“Even the most powerful actors will seek to invoke discourses in order to rationalize and justify their actions. So the power of an actor depends, at least in part, on whether that actor can produce, shape and propogate discourses that other actors accept as legitimate. There is thus an interaction between
Humphreys’ work analysed the process and frustrations of United Nations Forest Agreements (2009) Flyvbjerg (1998) also came to similar conclusions in his examination of rationality vs rationalisation in Aalborg. Human nature is a complex thing when it comes to working together to make decisions.

There are multitudes of communities even within Australia and we all belong to more than one and thus badging all of them as ‘the community’ is problematic. However, in the context of government policy, there needs to be simplicity and thus the lumping together of many communities in the mind of the writers to invent their particular version of ‘the community’ (Eversole, 2011). In real experience, in the NRM policy context, there was confusion from those coordinators of the message …the government discourse…about just who this community was and how they can best be engaged. Just which community were they working with and what about the other communities that were not engaged? (Hendricks et al, 2008).

As noted above, instances of sustainability occurs where the economic, social and environmental contexts intersect, in small confined sectors of their relationship to each other; leaving large areas in each sector which carry on with business as usual in a neoliberal world view (Hopwood et al, 2005; Parkin et al, 2003). This discourse “defines meanings, establishing and delineating the limits of action” (Humphreys, 2009, 324). A more sustainable future will require changing this conversation and accepted view of how things should be by consulting and allowing others to contribute their world view, both in terms of environmental caring and in many other arenas too where activity (public and community) is market driven.

I agree with Hopwood et al (2005) that we should look for a more holistic model to invoke sustainability; with fluid borders which allow filtration and osmosis of ideas, innovations and concepts between, around and through the combining concepts of economic, social, spiritual and environmental standpoints (Booth, 2006). There are multiple intersections and relationships on many different levels and recognition of this concept leads to a more pervading sense of what sustainability strives to attain.
Once you start to know about sustainability, it is impossible not to know about it, it colours all your thinking and how you make decisions.

In effect, this new model represents theoretical holism and promotes interdisciplinarity in addressing the world as many intertwined complex adaptive systems as the way forward, rather like letter tiles on an ‘Upwords’ (two dimensional scrabble) board, where words intersect and players use and reuse letters from other words to make new words on several different levels. These created words all have different meanings but they are essentially formed from each other and depend on the components of other words (ideas) to become ‘whole’. This thesis draws on these concepts and understandings of sustainability as background and describes the communities (the social) response to the correction of the environment by government funding (the economic). As Kelly et al (2005) noted

“The concept of sustainability…has begun to incorporate a more complex conceptual model that recognizes community-based activity as existing within a larger web of social relations. It provides a nuanced understanding of the linkages between social policy and social practice, as these are played out in diverse contexts (social, economic and environmental). It encourages a holistic and multidimensional analysis and provides a conceptual framework for assessing social issues (eg, health, education, crime) and engaging in social action” (320).

As the concept of sustainability has become mainstream, it has led to more loose definitions depending on who is using it and for what purpose. Saunier and Meganck (2004) suggested that the increasingly common usage by groups from environmentalists to global corporations and politicians led to it being referred to by the sceptical as ‘the S word’, combined with a rolling of the eyes and a switching off from the message. Jonathon Porritt (2007) commented that progress on institutionalizing sustainable development in government in the United Kingdom was still at the language stage – that is, most processes in government had a sustainability tag but the action phase had a way to go to catch up while “the architecture is at least there to enable things to happen more effectively in the future” (Porritt, 2007, np). So, the writers were getting to know the language and they could
integrate this into their writing without necessarily always understanding how it would work in practice.

Pawlowski (2007) asserted that the basis for sustainability “is an ethical principle of differential responsibility” (89); that is some – nations, industries, individuals – may be more morally responsible than others for the current state of the environment and for implementing necessary change but it is incumbent on all of us to acknowledge responsibility for the decisions we make as individuals that contribute to the way things are. This idea of ethics supports the idea that sustainability is, in effect, an overarching ethos or way of thinking – a discourse - a philosophy which should be applied to all levels of decision and policy making as well as to our individual lifestyle choices. It is thus better to focus on the principles of sustainability and recognition that it is a work in progress which provides indications of a way forward where humans can co-exist with nature in a manner which does not diminish the possibility of an equally fruitful existence for those who follow us.

Voβ and Kemp (2006) agreed that “sustainability goals … constitute ambiguous and moving targets” (20) and that the adoption of interactive deliberative processes ensured a variety of stakeholders could be recognized and included in any iterative policy making discussion. But, they must also pay attention to the unseen and the invisible in the community (see also McCool and Guthrie, 2001).

Looking for ways to achieve broader discussion and contribution to important ideas carries through to the methodologies I am using for this research and its contribution to the wider conversation. Policy makers need to know the outcomes of their actions and this research provides one such illustration – a study of an urban community based environmental catchment group in Western Australia. It redresses the balance in some small way by using IE to interrogate the group’s experience and reporting very much from a bottom up standpoint. It occurs to me that while this may turn out to be a one sided story, telling it may put it into focus as a consequence for the writers and agencies as well as the do-ers, the group, to read and ponder on too, to see what they did and what they might have done and how what they do now has happened as a result.
THE CASE STUDY

In Western Australia, in the late 1990s, interested people were encouraged to set up community based urban catchment groups to support and deliver government policy on the environment and to develop environmental awareness in their neighbourhoods through their activities. It is unclear whether the direct relationship between government policy and the setting up of the groups was made clear at the time to participants or whether the impetus was seen as a more localized attempt to assist existing groups which worked around the Swan River in Perth in response to some weather events which caused public concern about the state of the river. In the case of ‘the group’, members were actively canvassed by the local federal parliamentarian to become involved. This support helped to imbue a sense of ownership in some participants of their local patch of bush and a desire to learn more about the environment, and to some small extent increased general public awareness through enjoyment of the improvements and visible activities of the group in the local area.

In the Swan Region, during the period of this research, catchment groups were supported by employment of coordinators and project officers, funded by the Swan Canning Cleanup Program (SCCUP) and other programs on a short term contract basis. Some groups were more effective than others, more often than not a factor of their leadership, location or membership structure. However, in 2003, changes in federal NHT (NHT2) and state government funding strategies effectively removed the dedicated coordination support from catchment groups and instead bolstered bureaucracies controlled by agencies, experts and professionals (see Wallington et al, 2008).

Having lost this support, catchment groups had to think about how or if they would continue. Community participation in catchment groups and urban landcare varied across the Swan region. Coupled with the subsequent NHT regionalization process, which sought to create a more uniform platform from which to deliver funding, I wondered what impact this had on the willingness/availability/ability of community groups/volunteers to carry out integrated catchment management programs in urban areas.

The following excerpt from the Swan Catchment Council’s Swan Regional Strategy for Natural Resource Management (2004) provides a useful pointer to the issues
connected to community participation in environmental policy. While the Council’s ‘aspirational target’ is quoted as to “build regional capacity to promote attitudinal, behavioural and institutional change to achieve sustainable natural resource management outcomes” (Swan Catchment Council, 2004, 137), they described the processes which may threaten (sic) the development of this regional capacity as:

- Inadequate government/community NRM activity coordination
- Adoption of NRM principles and processes at State or Local Government levels
- Inadequate funding support for effective community NRM initiatives
- Volunteer and community burnout
- Willingness in the community for change (Swan Catchment Council, 2004, 137)

My aim is, thus, to look through an IE lens to see how this vision for the future of NRM, coupled with changing government policies and the regionalization of the catchment councils was translated to, first, steadily institutionalizing and then reducing the importance of ‘the catchment group’ and the narrative around community participation in NRM in Perth.

I will trace the effect of some of the frequent organizational, policy and strategic changes imposed by government agencies, both state and federal, on the ability of an urban community environmental group in Perth to participate effectively in Landcare through the experience of the catchment group and its members.

This process took place, ironically, at a period when there was a growing discussion about government/market/civic relations and the need for more inclusion of the community in the democratic decision making process (Jones et al, 2001).

I note too that the difficulties facing community based catchment groups may have come about through unintended omission on the part of policy makers (cf Blair Syme, CSIRO NRM Workshop April 2007); however intended, weakening the desirability or necessity for community participation in urban NRM rendered the creation of an environmentally sustainable community more difficult, unless new
strategies were developed to effect gradual change in local attitudes (see also Dovers, 2000).

Do we, who live in towns, have less connection to our environment? There was anecdotal evidence that urban communities were less aware of environmental issues in the Australian landscape and expected the government or the local council to look after the local park or river … *that’s why we pay rates and taxes* … unaware of what they could do as individuals to encourage the environment in their back yards and local places … thus the tension between *attitude change through regulation rather than awareness building through participation… rationalization vs rationality*. I noted an irate letter to the local community paper, expressing concern that the primary school’s new bush plantings looked untidy and unkempt and asking why sedges had been planted around the local pond making it difficult for dogs to have a swim from people with strong values about how things should look - neat and tidy.

Catchment and environmental groups could and, many do, play an important role in developing local knowledge and environmental awareness though promotion of sustainable practices amongst the wider population. It is difficult to accurately quantify people’s feelings and the success or otherwise of efforts to create an environmental ethos through government policy. This thesis will examine how this process resulted in concerting the group’s social relations and the effects of organization and privileging of knowledge for the community group.

Chapter 3, following, details the IE methodology and the reasons for choosing it to carry out this work. Chapter 4 gives the reader a broader background of the NRM landscape at the period of the research 2003 to 2008.
CHAPTER 3: WAYS OF SEEING AND DOING

The concept of instilling an intangible ethos such as caring for the environment through government policy, and the subsequent creation of a bureaucratic framework to deliver this policy through funding the do-ers, the community groups and volunteers, to do the on ground work, presents difficulties in implementation as well as evaluation and analysis. This work examines this concept in its practice by illuminating the catchment group’s experience of power through texts and governance. I do this because (mis)communication happens through omission, through interpreting varied and subjective frames of understandings and, in consequence, to people and their stories.

Flyvbjerg (1998) in his frontispiece quotes Machiavelli

Since my intention is to say something that will prove of practical use to the inquirer, I have thought it proper to represent things as they are in real truth, rather than as they are imagined.

Much as I can lay out what happened, I cannot guarantee that this is the ‘real truth’, rather it is my seeing of the truth at that particular point in time. Qualitative research can rarely deliver ‘the truth’. It is, by its nature, wide ranging and subjective, often incorporating several disciplines – inter and/or trans-disciplinary, all designed to find out the nature of an experience, how and whether what someone felt or thought, could be felt or thought by others too and what, if anything, this might mean, by inference or proof that this was the truth. And whose truth was it? Do different actors have different truths? (Branaman, 2003; Dale, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994)

Perhaps instead of truth, we can talk about rationality which is “context dependent and that the context of rationality is power” (Flyvbjerg, 1998, 97). Flyvbjerg discovered quite quickly through his description of a planning process in Aalborg, Sweden that “power blurs the dividing line between rationality and rationalization” and that “when powerful actors require rationalization and not rationality, the
rationalization is miraculously produced. The freedom to interpret and use ‘rationality’ and ‘rationalization’ in the service of power is a key element in enabling power to define reality” (1998, 97-98).

Rose and Miller (1992) suggested that academic theories “provide a kind of intellectual machinery for government, in the form of procedures for rendering the world thinkable” (182, italics in original). This creating of power in the form of machinery to govern underlies the concept that, in order to make things happen, policy decisions need to be manageable and thus de-constructable into the lowest common denominators of what it means and how to implement it with an abstract, faraway, simplistic vision of what it will look like, or not (Lemke, 2001).

Loibl (2006) suggests that “increased reflexivity must compensate for the loss of control and certainty that is characteristic in transdisciplinary research processes” (299) and that it is through reflecting on and integrating the very diversity of insights on the part of the researchers and their subjects that allows for ‘out of the box’ understanding and solutions to complex problems. This could equally be true for policy makers.

Real life is far more complex than empirical studies and hypothesized outcomes and there are larger processes at work in the seemingly local experience. Gluckman instructed his students to “conceptualise their object of study as a ‘social field’ in which larger processes are manifest in localized social relations” (Austin, 1984, 126; Gluckman, 1963). This necessarily also includes their own preconceptions as researchers. If anything, the best description for this work is in the combining of social history and ethnography. As Austin suggests:

A method … which moves between ethnography and structural analysis avoids the sins of triviality, overly abstract theory, and the presumption that ordinary people do not know what they are doing. At the same time this technique may achieve …. studies that also address larger issues of Australian society (1984, 139).

The idea that social science must be relevant and represent real lived experience reflects the Aristotelian concept of ‘phronesis’ or ‘practical wisdom’ (Booth, 2006; Flyvbjerg, 2001)
Phronesis goes beyond both analytical, scientific knowledge (episteme) and technical knowledge (techne) and involves judgments and decisions made in the manner of a virtuoso social and political actor (Flyvbjerg, 2001, 2).

We are, after all, social actors, whether we are the researched or the researchers, and thus necessarily we bring to our contributions and interpretations of any ‘truth’ the benefit (or otherwise) of our previous experience and preconceptions and our current experience of life as we live it. This is confirmed by Dale (2001) who suggests that in natural science:

detachment and emotional neutrality are the preferred behaviours, whereas compassion and caring are seen as undesirable. The possibility of detachment, however, may well be one of the greatest myths humans have adopted in their working lives. For we are very subjective creatures, and our perceptions of reality are strongly influenced by the paradigms, myths and metaphors that find their way into both personal and professional contexts. We are not value free, and paradoxically, we may achieve greater degrees of objectivity only when we can appreciate our subjectivity (x).

Dorothy Smith confirms the difficulty or indeed the impossibility of neutrality and suggests that:

Beginning from the standpoint of women locates a subject who begins in a material and local world. It shows the different cognitive domains structuring our realities … as a bifurcation of consciousness, with a world directly experienced from oneself as center (in the body) on the one hand and a world organised in the abstracted conceptual mode, external to the local and particular places of one’s bodily existence. The abstracted mode of the scientific province is always located in the local and material actualities. Participation in the “head” world is accomplished in actual concrete settings making use of definite material means (1987, 84-85).
I wanted to understand and write about the everyday experience of ‘the catchment group’ in the context of institutions (power) using some of the tools of Smith’s IE to describe the activities of the group and their lived experience. By tracing some of their history and incorporating parallel reports and directives from government and other agencies, the rationality and power relations that have concerted their experience will become self-evident. As is often the case, when you take an interest in a particular issue, or see a distinctive blue car that matches your sunglasses that you would like to purchase, so many incidents (or blue cars) seem to become apparent. While much of my data collection for this particular project occurred between 2003 and 2008, now that I am re-immersed in the ideas, I have heard from community groups recently still asking the question “why do we have to have policies, do all this paperwork – we are just volunteers?” (Paulin, 2012) Those who work in the activation and application of policies find themselves time and again trying to find new ways to work with community groups to attain transparency and measurable outcomes. There is a yawning gap between what bureaucracy demands of the community groups and what the groups themselves are often able or willing to perform. This is indeed a wicked problem – how can this be achieved in the face of competing perspectives and policy requirements? (Head, 2008). The telling of my research will highlight the group’s experience so that others may learn from it and apply it to theirs and, specifically, renders IE a key tool to achieving this.

I touched on Flyvbjerg’s book *Rationality and Power* (1998) in Chapter 2, which, while not named as an institutional ethnography (he would call it ‘phronetic’), has many similarities with the praxis of IE and is an excellent example of how we, as social observers, can document real life situations (in his case, the narration and analysis of a traffic and urban design project in the city of Aalborg from the standpoint of the planning committee). From this reality, we can seek to make plain the underlying scenario of power relations, which, in his view, concerted rationalization over rationality (Flyvbjerg, 1998; see also Eubank, 2012) and is what Smith (1997) would term ‘concerting social relations’.

Using case studies to illustrate examples/incidents in qualitative research sits very comfortably on such a phronetic foundation and has become more widely used as a research tool to frame a story or an event or an experience (Flyvbjerg, 2006). It
allows the researcher to examine particular social activities in a limited setting, providing a snapshot which can be a useful form of comparison with other similar experiences. While Yin and others would suggest that the findings from a case study are not often generalisable to a wider population, the case study does represent “a sample” and the findings can be used to formulate the researcher’s theories about why specific things occur in particular situations, which Yin terms “analytic generalization” (Yin, 1989, 21). He suggests:

A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon with its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (1989, 23).

Mjøset (2006) compares three different viewpoints on case studies: the traditional approach using scientific processes of hypothesis, experiment and theory creation; the ‘socio-philosophical attitude’, in which

the understanding of a case is regarded as a holistic impression of the total situation studied; theory in that case may be understood as transcendental, basic notions of structure and action …(Mjøset, 2006, 736).

and a third approach, which Mjøset favours, - grounded theory - which draws on “US pragmatism … and … European critical (standpoint) theories … the participationist or pragmatist attitude” (2006, 737).

I suggest a fourth approach which occupies the dialectical space between the top down and bottom up. As researchers we can never presume that we come to a project without some thought of initial theory or correlations with another experience, whether implicit or explicit …our baggage² which informs and is informed by every new experience, often unknowingly. However, in this fourth approach, which follows Smith (1988), while acknowledging these initial preconceptions, they are not solidified and can and do interact with the empirical

² Which brings to mind the Luggage in Terry Pratchett’s novels which has many legs and a mind of its own and a tendency to smash through! See http://discworld.wikia.com/wiki/The_Luggage
findings and respondents’ participatory experiences during the research process (see also Teghtsoonian, 2015)

Flyvbjerg (2006) disagrees with the view that a case study can only be useful as a pilot for a larger study and cannot stand on its own (Dogan & Pelassy, 1990). He sees case studies as an important tool for ‘modern’ social science in recording everyday human activities as opposed to reducing them to numbers in an experiment. Flyvbjerg (2006) ascribes to Wittgenstein’s approach which implies exploring phenomena first hand instead of reading maps of them. Actual practices are studied before their rules, and one is not satisfied by learning about only those parts of practices that are open to public scrutiny (219).

The maps are Chinese Whispers - someone’s drawing of what they see or what they understand from someone else’s telling. In order to understand the map, one must have an all-round view of it, from various actors and positions, including what Goffman (cited by Flyvbjerg, 2001) calls the “backstage” or what is going on behind the scenes. This behind the scenes work is typified by texts which ‘concert’ what Smith calls ‘ruling relations’ (1987). In other words, the way that decisions are made and recorded and policies written delineates the experience of those who are later bound by them, often unknowingly. For example, we tend to live our lives according to the template instilled in us by our parents and they theirs, despite the fact that the instigation for a particular behavioural model may have long lost its relevance. It has been inscribed in the text of our family’s mores and concerts us to behave in a particular manner. Jenkins (1992) addresses this in his study of Bourdieu, who suggested that the status quo will always be maintained because actors will instinctively follow the same pathways and opportunities that were followed in the past and which form the backbone of their culture, and their behaviour is the result of the acceptance as probable of a future which would be similar to the present … through the internalization (as children) of the expectations about the future articulated by significant (adult) others. It is those expectations which produce probabilities and create social reality, not the other way around (Jenkins, 1992, 81).
Jenkins compares this Bourdieun theory of habitus to the theory of structural functionalism of Talbot Parsons: “social stability is the product of the internalisation of shared values, beliefs and norms” (Jenkins, 1992, 81). This lends force to the need to uncover those norms and the way that they structure our lived experience (Smith, 1988).

This idea of the future as destiny, that we are predetermined by what we have learned as children, is questioned by Manuel Castells (2004) who writes about the network society and suggests that

historical evolution is an open-ended, conflictive process, enacted by subjects and actors who try to make society according to their interests and values, or more often, produce social forms of organization by resisting the domination of those who identify social life with their own desires enforced through violence (Castells, 2004, 14).

Thus, in answer to my earlier question about whether or not or how change can occur, is it indeed possible that a series of murmurings can grow into advocacy that will grow in strength and in time make a difference? This is why writing this way is necessary in order to show people what happens ‘in real life’ and to encourage them to speak and become active citizens. Marx’s dialectic is also valid here, that it is just small changes that occur over time that in full circle become the norm (AtKisson, 2011).

WHAT DID I DO?

When I started this work and with appropriate ethics approval, I initially observed the activities and behaviours of the catchment group and its members in order to find out what an examination of these had to offer for my research – what question there was for me to ask? This social mapping showed where people fitted into the framework and what they did and said and thought and how they reacted to events and ideas in the life of the group. This form of mapping highlighted either in omission or in seeing several strands leading the same way, what in IE is called a ‘problematic’ – something that once you see the bigger picture you can’t help
noticing and need to follow up … the lightbulb moment (Smith, 1988, Campbell & Gregor, 2004).

Membership of the catchment group was not formalized and was instead formed by a database recording everyone who had shown an interest in their work. I posted an exploratory survey to all known members of the group (65) which included questions about why they joined, how they valued the river and local environment and what their contribution to the group was now and would be in the future (See appendix 1). On analysis of this survey (17 completed surveys from a sample of 65), I noted there was one question none of the members responded to. This question asked members how they viewed the impact of government influence on what they could do as a group and the subsequent professionalization or bureaucratisation of their catchment group. While this revealed the crux of the ‘problematic’ I had identified through getting to know the people and mapping the group and their activities, it suggested superficially that either the respondents had never considered government influence or professionalisation to be an issue or else they were unaware of how much their community group was influenced by various texts and regulation which concerted their activities (Smith, 1988). Alternatively, they may have noticed it but had developed no tools to deal with it or change it. Thus, the survey results illuminated my problematic through the absence of reaction.

Ultimately, my observations of the group at a number of catchment group committee meetings and numerous interviews with 15 respondents (consisting of community friends’ group members, catchment group co-ordinators and members, sub-regional catchment group staff, a federal NRM coordinator and others, identified in this work as Respondent 1-15) over a period of three years reformulated my interest from what the volunteers felt about government influence to recording how changing government policy and funding mechanisms had affected the group’s livelihood. This may seem a very fine distinction, but it is an important one when considering the benefits of phronesis alongside institutional ethnography, as opposed to purely quantitative research. This process also revealed how I, as the researcher who was sometimes interviewer, sometimes observer, other times a participant and a confidante, benefitted from an ‘outsider’ as well as an ‘insider’ perspective.
Smith (1987), in defining a sociology for women as opposed to the traditional objectified practice of social science, maintained the importance of ‘bottom-up’ investigation, grounded in the personal and immediate of a particular standpoint, emphasizing, and, as I have noted above, deliberately acknowledging the subjectivity and participation of the actors in the inquiry as well as that of the inquirer.

Smith’s (1987) ‘institutional ethnography’ provides an especially useful methodological framework for this research, particularly with relation to identifying the textually mediated power or ‘ruling relations’ which have become evident during the research process. While named as a form of ‘ethnography’, Smith’s work was primarily an effort to formulate a feminist sociology distinct from the dominant male paradigm of objectifying the subjects of research and in so doing, removing their agency as sentient human actors, a position which my reading of Flyvbjerg (2006) would also support. Given my involvement as a participant observer and occasional confidante/sounding board of some actors in this research process, I consider it vital not to profess objectivity, but rather the narrative is, by definition, my interpretation of the various stories and themes that have unfolded over the period of study in the light of what they said and what was silent, yet I think needed to be made clear.

As mentioned above, IE positions the researcher at the standpoint of the subject’s experience in order to map the various relationships and stakeholders; to identify a problematic or important question which would serve to illustrate their experiences as social actors and which they may be unaware of. Smith advocates the examination of various ‘texts’ which are central to the lived experience of the group. The way that these texts dictate or affect the way that this experience is lived, is what Smith calls “concerting social relations” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, 32). While no two groups or circumstances are experienced in exactly the same way due to variation in personalities and perceptions, this process does offer an opportunity to generalise the findings between groups of actors who are subject to the same texts across similar contexts.

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3 Since writing this thesis, the concept of phronesis as a valid methodology in social science as opposed to positivism and reductionism has been bolstered by more consideration of the process by academics and set out in publications including Flyvbjerg et al (2012) Real Social Science: Applied Phronesis.
It opens up to empirical investigation aspects of power operating in social life that otherwise lie hidden and mysterious. This approach to analysing texts as part of social relations allows researchers to discover how people are related to each other in pre-determined ways, even if they do not know each other and never even meet. If people handle and process the same texts, they find their actions coordinated by the requirements of working with the text. That is how a text has the power to coordinate and concert—to hold people to acting in particular ways. On the other hand, people who do meet face-to-face and think they are relating to each other as individuals may not recognise how, without their knowing it, their actions are also being shaped by texts (M. Campbell & Gregor, 2004, 32).

To illustrate this further, Grahame and Grahame (2000) described the experiences of a group of predominantly Asian immigrants who came from non-English speaking backgrounds and who were undertaking a workplace training module. The module was carefully designed by a government agency with the objective of readying unemployed people for workplace. However, in this case, the training was of little use because there was no provision for assisting the students with English lessons. Many of the participants had qualifications from their own countries, but the overriding requirement for them to enter the workforce was English language skills which they also needed to understand the course.

In this instance, IE analysed how political discourse and organisational knowledge on macro levels translate into micro practices that distance educational access, govern actual employment opportunity, and shape participant’s quality of life (Wright, 2003, 243).

Institutional ethnography as a methodology is often used to examine public health, education and welfare situations because of its ability to identify the ever present ruling relations and to pinpoint particular subjectivities that can disadvantage clients of these services. De Montigny described how the proficient use of documents and texts in the form of legislation, policy manuals, memoranda, case files, and various reports occurs almost automatically as skilled professionals perform their daily work. Indeed,
the very possibility of professional authority depends to a large degree on
the ability of practitioners to employ textual realities to mediate the detail
for their daily practice (1995, 21).

His research “explicates the practical exercise of textually mediated power by
examining a specific textual fragment” (de Montigny, 1995, 21) in the form of a
sentence in a social worker’s case file. The sentence “the apartment smelled of
urine” (1995, 21) when followed through the textual mediation of a social work
organisation illustrated just how easily an innocuous statement or personal
judgement can affect professional judgment. In this case, “the smell was inscribed
into a professional code as a matter indicating parental failure and therefore as
properly deserving social work attention” (1995, 23) based on the fact that the author
had a professional background in the field of social work and that it was common
practice to accept the judgments of colleagues as fact. This is but one example of
how the simple act of recording perceptions and filling in forms for clients can “
construct a reality which can be ordered, regulated, and administered” (de Montigny,
1995, 219; see also de Montigny, 2011). The consequences of this making invisible
of important knowledge should be made plain to the writers who design policy to
address symptoms not causes, what is visible in isolation from their praxis and thus
promise short term and short sighted solutions (Dale, 2001; Davis, Wanna et al,
1990). Again, these policies instigate wicked problems of how to implement and
how to manage outcomes, when the designed delivery or praxis is in the hands of a
divergent group of stakeholders (the Chinese Whisperers) (Head, 2008).

Walby uses IE in re-searching surveillance studies because of its “unique ability to
explicate how surveillance subjects are linked to and managed by discursive,
managerial, and professional forms of power” (2005, 158). He critiques the more
traditional forms of institutional theory espoused by Di Maggio & Powell (1983)
who see texts as instruments for standardizing organizational structures and he
argues that this view of texts as “constituents of organisations” silences the agency
of the individuals who work in these structures.

Without an ethnographic focus on people who do the work of reading,
interpreting and inscribing texts, we are left with a monolithic notion of
discourse determining the bounds of agency. This reinforces the fact that
institutional ethnography is not simply an approach one can adopt in small parts by saying “let’s focus on texts”. Rather, IE as method is important because it situates individuals in the complexity of their lived realities and draws from their experiential knowledge of those realities to show how sequences of texts coordinate actions, consciousness and form of organisation extra-locally (Walby, 2005, 164-165).

This IE looks at “what informants know and what they are observed doing for the analytic purpose of identifying, tracing and describing the special relations that extend beyond the boundaries of any one informant’s experiences (or even all the informants’ experiences)” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, 92).

In keeping with my instinctive detective tendencies, IE is a matter of watching and looking, making connections, finding out more and understanding why and how and then describing it … uncovering the invisible

the process of inquiry is rather like grabbing a ball of string, finding a thread, and then pulling it out; that is why it is difficult to specify in advance exactly what the research will consist of. The researcher knows what she wants to explain, but only step by step does she know who she needs to interview, or what texts and discourses she needs to examine (DeVault & McCoy, 2002, 755).

Thus, reading widely about other people’s stories doesn’t help me to know the group’s stories. The purpose of background reading, in this form of research, is not to situate it as authoritative on what has gone before as in a literature review, but rather as a tool to locate the researcher in the topic and to help identify how texts have created particular prevailing ruling relations (Campbell and Gregor, 2004). Texts form a vital part of IE research as they point out, in the way they are written, how they can be responded to and by whom. However, the IE method is based not on a traditional literature review but rather on the day-to-day and on the ways that people experience their situation in the ‘everyday/everynight world’ (Smith, 1987; Campbell & Gregor, 2004). I found reading other people’s accounts of their research sometimes trapped me in their voices, not the voices of those I wanted to listen to in order to find out how it happened in real life, but in those who had written
what they ‘knew’. Using the voices of the writers to tell the stories of the observed silences the group’s lived experiences. This was also a personal experience of being institutionalized, of my ability to communicate being ‘concerted’ by other people’s norms.

In keeping with the feminist ethos surrounding IE, and something I have always considered good practice on the part of the inquirer, I reported back to the people who have been part of this inquiry to show them what I found by observing the social and ruling relations which form their experience – to tell them my reading of their story. I delivered the results of the original survey and the focus group (wisdom council) to the group’s executive committee as part of their ongoing meetings so they could discuss it and take action as appropriate and, once complete, I will give them this writing to show them what I saw.

It is not a given that you will always work from the standpoint of a disadvantaged group – one that is having stuff imposed on them – but the outcomes of the IE serves to illuminate how actors have been socialised into their experience and in so doing may have assumed a false relation to the outcomes – may be convinced that they were acting in one way but in fact were doing something else. For instance, Campbell, Copeland et al (1999) looked at the way nursing case managers activated an assessment form (a text) which prescribed their relationship with their clients and their eventual health outcomes. By restricting the information recorded during interviews with their clients to what could be fitted into answering pre-formulated questions, much of their client’s later experience was designed around a curtailed representation of what the case manager had observed, similar to de Montigny’s experience (1995). The inquiry process revealed that the case managers were actually working “in the service of the organisation” and “far from being “a servant of the client” which is how they saw themselves (Campbell et al, 1999).

As I found from the results of the survey carried out for this research, actors may not always be aware of the circumstances that concert their activities, how they behave now and in the future.

It is methodologically important, institutional ethnographers insist, to be attentive to how someone, speaking about their life, misses its social
organisation … For researchers convinced of the importance of the
discursive organisation of everyday life, the social organisation of
knowledge is useful theory and institutional ethnography is a relevant
analytic approach” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, 91).

The value of this particular research lies in using IE to explicate the experience of
participants, both volunteer community members and employed staff in an urban
community based environmental catchment group over the period 2003-2008,
through mapping their perceptions and activities against documentation of ongoing
change in both group structure and government policy and delivery of natural
resource management (NRM).

IE has typically been utilized as a research methodology in public health and
education, not least because its feminist ideals and desire to provide an alternative
‘female’ sociology resonates with researchers in that field (Campbell et al., 1999;
Campbell, 1998; de Montigny, 1995; DeVault & McCoy, 2002). Grahame and
Grahame (2000) used IE to explicate the disconnect of eco-tourism from its local
environment and, in keeping with it being an ‘alternative’ methodology, it has been
taken up as a format which enables activist research (Naples, 2003; Nichols, 2007).

While the process in this research follows the model of describing and explicating
ruling relations, I think it is a first attempt to use this methodology in exposing the
ruling relations engendered by a government policy of encouraging community
involvement in NRM in Australia through the provision of funding and other
structures to support this. Eastwood (2005) has used this methodology in telling the
story of UN Forest Deliberations and the experience of participants situated as they
were in civil society and as representatives of and contributing to global governance.

Turner (2003) also used IE to explicate the power relations implicit in a planning
process by examining each document and recorded conversation in great detail.

WAYS OF DOING – METHODS FOR THIS WORK

Two ethics approvals were sought and approved: one for the bulk of the research
between 2003 and 2008 and the other for follow up interviews with some players in
2011. The initial qualitative survey results, in depth qualitative interviews with 15
respondents (identified in the text as Respondent 1, 2 etc) over the period 2003-2008
and a focus group (wisdom council) activity were carried out. This allowed me to
create a social map of the activities of the group and its actors. This in turn, lead me to identify the problematic which would form the basis of my research: how does the framing of community action through creating a dependence on government funding and its attendant bureaucracy do the community a dis-service by ‘calcifying’ the process and how do the ‘do-ers’ experience this?

Once the problematic became evident, I carried out a comprehensive study of both the group’s written historical documents and the wider activity of environmental groups and councils and relevant policy development processes to discern the narrative which surrounded the concept of NRM and community involvement in it, as it related to the catchment group. This, in turn, revealed the practice of various forms of ruling relations in a multi-tiered spectrum from the federal government down through state and local government, various agencies and across the regional NRM bodies themselves.

I have written about some of the texts which bounded what happened to the group in the Swan Region of Western Australia over the period 2003-2008. This will include some critique of the Natural Heritage Trust Fund processes and environmental funding policy in general, both state and federal, including the consequent roll outs and revisions (See Chapter 4).

The initial qualitative survey of the group’s ‘members’ provided useful background as to how they perceived the environment and a measure of their willingness to commit time to group activities or to learn about aspects of bushcare. For instance, respondents expressed a desire for better communication between the coordinator and the members, in terms of knowing what was happening so they could make an informed decision about participating. Respondents did not, however, answer the questions regarding the influence of regional groups and governments on their group activities… they were silent partners. As posited elsewhere, this may have been because their attachment to the group was more of an occasional activity, rather than a commitment to being active group members and, thus, respondents may not have been aware of the various changes that were taking place or have an opinion to offer.

Following the survey, I carried out 15 individual in-depth interviews with group members, local NRM officers and coordinators, a federal government coordinator a
department of agriculture officer and 3 representatives of other urban catchment
groups to ascertain issues which appeared most pressing in their experience with the
NRM rollout and the group in particular. I mapped the various parties involved in the
NRM funding process most relevant for the group and the issues raised during the
interviews. From this, I developed the problematic: how does the framing of
community action through creating a dependence on government funding and its
attendant bureaucracy do the community a dis-service by ‘calcifying’ the process
and how do the ‘do-ers’ experience this? The ensuing account includes examples of
how the use of text and symbol has worked to “concert” what Dorothy Smith calls
“ruling relations” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004; Smith, 1988) and the effect this has
had on the group’s progress. I have set out the experience of the group members in
Chapter 5.

Given the amount of change that occurred over the period of this data collection, I
felt it was important to provide another type of forum where people felt comfortable
to vent their feelings and talk about their own experience and ideas for the future. I
set up a wisdom council or focus group using dynamic facilitation methods (DF)
(Zubizarreta & Rough, 2002) to allow this to occur. This is a “transformational
emergent” (Zubizarreta & Rough, 2002, 4) approach which encourages participants
to think outside the box to understand and create innovative consensus based
solutions to intractable problems. The basic skills of a dynamic facilitator include
“the ability to listen well to others; the ability to not ‘take sides’ but instead to ‘take
all sides’; the ability to trust, allow and follow an emergent process…. enough self-
understanding to be able to ‘get out the way’” (Zubizarreta & Rough, 2002, 5).

The DF process is unusual in that participants are encouraged to choose the topic of
discussion themselves, usually within very broad parameters and with little or no
prompting from the facilitator. This technique also allows individuals to vent or
purge their feelings on a particular issue without being ‘managed’ or closed down.
This is often confronting to other participants and traditional facilitators as they may
feel that the meeting is being hijacked\(^4\), but, in the DF process, it allows the

\(^4\) This comes from anecdotal feedback during a Dynamic Facilitation Training Course which I
attended in Perth in 23-25 May 2006. Most of the participants were experienced professional
facilitators.
individual to feel that they have been heard and, in so doing, clears their headspace so that they can see past their strongly held views to listen to others (Zubizarreta & Rough, 2002). The facilitator mirrors back to the speaker what they have said and in so listening they can hear and record the story they are telling. It is in this space, that transformational processes can occur and barriers, which were presumed to be impenetrable, can be overcome allowing the development of creative choices and solutions, supported by all.

Choice creating is a “zone” of thinking that has powerful benefits. It provides a new way for groups to address difficult issues, solve them, reach consensus, and build trust and the spirit of community. Because Dynamic Facilitation is a systemic way that one person can bring about this quality of thinking and get these results in untrained, diverse groups of people, it offers new prospects for systems change and for the concept of transformational leadership (Zubizarreta & Rough, 2002, 107).

In the case of this research, wisdom council participants were asked to address the broad theme of environmental issues, which then naturally tapered down to their actual experiences as volunteers, identifying and creating some choices and recommendations for the future of the catchment group 5. The outcomes of the wisdom council were listed during the process and later circulated to all participants and other interested parties. The issues and suggestions raised were then presented at a regular meeting of the catchment group to contribute to redefining the structure of the group and, hopefully, re-enlivening its activities and its sense of purpose.

DF shares some design issues with group interviews with regard to what people are prepared to contribute, Stewart and Shamdasani suggest:

Since no individual is required to answer any given question in a group interview, the individual’s responses can be more spontaneous, less conventional, and should provide a more accurate picture of the person’s position on some issue. In the group interview, people speak only when

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5 The final report to the catchment group on the outcomes of the wisdom council is attached at Appendix A.
they have definite feelings about a subject and not because a question requires a response (1990, 19).

Focus group type situations (including consensus based processes such as the wisdom council activity for this research) do have disadvantages in that their limited size precludes the range of perspectives represented, with implications for the ability to generalise the findings over a wider field. However, the discussion above with respect to case studies is relevant here. It is also true that it is often only those with a real interest or, on occasion, a particular agenda, who will make a special effort to give up their time to contribute to an exercise through which they hope to be heard. This is true of respondents in many forms of social scientific research. The researcher has to decide how many people to interview and how to select those who are going to provide a range of useful information. When researching the activities of a small group such as the catchment group, the likely sources of information are necessarily limited and random sampling techniques are not feasible. In my view, this does not make the findings of this research any less valid as long as these limitations are clearly addressed in the ensuing discussion. As my contribution to the field, this study based on the activities of such a group, although not tenable as representative of the scenario in every catchment group, for instance, may well be typical of many and as such will provide useful information both to the groups themselves and to those who design community participation, capacity building and natural resource management frameworks and policies in future.
CHAPTER 4: THE BIGGER PICTURE - MANAGING NATURAL RESOURCES

The core story of this thesis is about a small urban community catchment group – the group -operating within the larger NRM or environmental management regime. Such groups do not exist in isolation and thus it is necessary to give an overview of some of the various structures and relationships under which they exist. These organizational networks are quite complex and, from the point of view of community members, unwieldy and difficult to navigate. They are subject to constant and ongoing change due to altered political priorities, recasting of environmental policy to ‘improve’ delivery, involvement of new stakeholders and the tendency to bureaucratise the environmental regeneration process at the community level. Thus, it is the role of this chapter to untangle some of the networks of power-full relationships, rationalities and responsibilities.

There is a whole dialogue to be had about the concept of ‘managing’ the environment and whose responsibility it is which while fascinating is too large to cover in this work and it would divert from the purpose of this research. In this chapter, I will talk about the fairly recent notion of institutionalizing community based NRM by government policy in Australia and some of the ways in which it was talked about, designed and implemented.

WHAT IS NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT?

NRM engenders not only the sympathetic management of environmental resources for the future by farmers and those who are deemed traditional users of the environment, but also, crucially, should include creating environmentally aware citizens locally and globally to educate them about their relationship to and (ab)use of the natural environment. This is particular important now as we see more evidence every day of damaged places caused by our thoughtlessness and insatiable
appetite for new and (m)ore. Synapse Consulting (2000) defined NRM as ‘the management of potential and realised impacts of people on the environment with the purpose of attaining ecologically sustainable development’ (1). They reminded us that our impact on nature can occur on a ‘local and distant’ level, both ‘directly and indirectly’ (Synapse Consulting, 2000) and thus there was a need for everyone to be held responsible, policy makers, consumers and producers and not just the farmer at the beginning of the production/consumption chain who is closest to the ground (see also Andrew & Aslin, 2003, Lockwood et al., 2010)

Lockwood et al (2010) define NRM as:

   a collective action problem requiring diverse actors—governments, farmers, business, communities, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—to integrate their activities so that improvements in the condition of natural resources can be achieved (989).

They cite Howlett and Rayner (2006) in calling this collective action ‘new governance’ (2010). They further suggest that:

   The cross-boundary nature of NRM and other environmental challenges necessitates a principle that supports (a) recognition of interdependency among people and issues; (b) coordination across governance levels, policy sectors, and spatial domains; and (c) vertical and horizontal coherence of such spheres. Such integration is also necessary to avoid duplication and problem displacement and promote efficient resource use (989).

The need to broaden the load of managing natural resources is obvious as the supply chain doesn’t stop at the farm gate – it is cradle to cradle, from seed to compost or landfill site. We consume the (re)sources of the land, be they food, timber, water, aesthetics et al. There are whole systems of natural park areas across the country that are owned by us - the ‘common wealth’ - and managed by various agencies and groups on our behalf and we live on country that needs just as much care and attention as ‘the Bush’. Thus, we, as livers in any place, do need to be involved in the ideas that NRM was designed to project to a much greater degree than at present. The question is how to make this happen.
In this work, I have mapped some bureaucratic attempts to do this as it occurred to the group. Butler et al (2000) detailed several approaches to incorporate input from community members into NRM projects on a continuum which ranged from consultative projects designed by researchers and scientists (officials) prior to asking for community input at one end, to truly participatory projects where the community was involved in the design and took ownership at the other. They stressed that given the range of possibilities for designing and operating NRM projects, simply calling “for natural resources policy and management that is community-based” (2) is not enough. They also mention the issue of generalisability of outcomes, a frequent catch cry of scientists who have bemoaned community based NRM projects as un-rigorous and, sometimes, too, a waste of money (Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales, 2002; see also Procter et al, 2010, Lockwood et al, 2010).

This story takes up this challenge by looking at some past examples and uncovering and making visible the (dis)-connections and rationalisations and memetic isomorphisms and new wheels (reinvented) that have emerged in urban environmental community groups as a result of natural resources policy enacted through the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) and other similar government vehicles over the period 2003 to 2008.

**EARLY COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

Community interest in protecting the Australian environment is not a new phenomenon. Mosley (1988) put together a timeline which showed the changing understandings of the early European colonists subjected to the vagaries of the Australian environment over time from droughts to flooding rains. A few examples follow:

The first European settlers in the new colony of New South Wales exploited natural resources rather than conserving them (1789-1850s). Their need was for food, shelter and to create farms and land for development for a growing colonial population. The nascent forestry and agricultural sectors were important sources of export income and local power and the sector was governed by its evident profitability rather than its impact on the environment (Mosley 1988). Governor
Macquarie and his wife were responsible with others for introducing merino sheep to Australia and institutionalizing and developing the thriving agricultural sector that we know today. As the colonists became more settled, they started to appreciate the strange and different nature which surrounded them and the difficulties of farming in a totally different context to that they knew in Europe. This took time as most social activity took place with reference to Britain and the British system of government. The growing independence of the colonies and the wealth accrued as a result of the various Gold Rushes across the country brought about more of a sense of control over how development occurred and “economic self-reliance” and from “the 1850s onwards conservation began to be approached in a more systematic way” (Mosley, 1988, 179). For example, Native Game Protection Acts were passed in New South Wales to protect rapidly depleting stocks of emu and kangaroo from hunting.

In the 1860s, Victoria took up the government surveyor’s recommendations that a 100 foot strip along the coast be reserved for public ownership and, from 1880, this was applied to rivers and stream banks as well (Mosley, 1988, 179). While this was initially aimed at retaining public access, it also contributed to the idea of protecting these natural features.

Across Australia, from the late 1800s, community lobby groups formed to persuade state and colonial governments to protect some important forested areas as national parks and passive recreation reserves (Mosley, 1988). For example, in New South Wales, the Salt Pan Creek Progress Association formed in 1913 to assert the local-european - community’s voice in the face of increasing pressures for new housing and industrial development and their platform included maintaining the foreshore of the Georges River for public recreation (Goodall et al, 2005). Goodall et al (2005) researched these stories in the Georges River area and found many such community organisations grew up around this time and, later, in 1949, the Picnic Point Regatta Association (25km southwest of Sydney’s city centre, on the George’s River) lobbied local and state government to return a large private riverfront estate to the public domain so that it would be retained for public access and the native bush protected from development; apart from building toilets, boat ramps and other recreational infrastructure (Goodall et al, 2005). Funding, as always, was an issue, and so the community group made the pragmatic decision to carry out sand mining.
in the bed of the river in order to raise sufficient funds to look after the new reserve area. They didn’t know much about the deleterious effects of dredging and sand mining at the time and this activity provided a ready source of funds for the organization to carry out its work. The Regatta Association members were a forward looking group and even then saw the need to

ensure the coordination of management of the river would go beyond the limitations of any one municipal boundary and would recognize the importance of seeing the river as a continuous flow, in which damage inflicted up river had consequences for all below, rather than considering impacts only within one government area (Goodall et al, 2005, 10).

The Association established a Trust with membership from the three local councils, local community members and an expert in conservation matters, a precursor of the integrated catchment management model that we have today (Goodall et al, 2005). The Georges River National Park Trust was established in 1962 following the announcement of the creation of the National Park in 1961.

Twenty or so years of community management later, in 1982, the parks were restructured yet again as State Recreation Areas which changed the emphasis of their management from local to regional. “Essentially, the local community members were being told that they were neither ‘the public’ nor did they embody ‘the national’ as they had once seen themselves to do” (Goodall et al, 2005, 14). Then in 1987, in a further move away from local control, leadership of the Trust committee was devolved to state agency representatives with local council representation downgraded from a leadership role to that of community representatives. Finally, in 1991, the Trust was wound down and the Parks declared a national park under the control of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. This alienated many in the local community who had regarded the parks as their local places; who objected to hefty increases in access fees and limited opening hours and loss of recognition of their values and caring for that place.

Such changes were in direct conflict with many of the local community’s understanding of what a ‘national park’ would involve. The shift away from prioritizing local needs and uses, the reduction in access through charges and
opening hours and the shift away from facilitating human recreational uses meant that the change had removed some of the central qualities of both the ‘national’ and ‘the public’ from the very place-based way in which that concept was understood by the parklands founding community. The very clear message taken home by many in the community was that YOU are NOT “the public” (Goodall et al, 2005, 16).

Goodall et al’s (2005) paper makes very interesting reading for those interested in people and place - community - as it narrates what happened over many years and these events set eerie precedents for the ways that NRM has again been devolved away from the local community in the present day, as will be seen from my research as it unfolds. As Goodall et al concluded:

There are important roles to play for park management authorities like National Parks and local government in widening social representation in environmental decision-making beyond the narrow social and cultural limitations of these early local committees. However, removing the local, social responsibility for and ownership over public green space which they had generated will only undermine city environmental sustainability. A more constructive approach would be to recognize the highly valuable community commitment to saving and conserving and maximizing access to greenspace. Such a commitment should be celebrated and embraced as a base on which to build a more representative and diverse management structure and process which appreciates local custodianship (2005, 20).

So, if the community isn’t seen to be responsible enough for what happens to the environment …who is?

**WHO IS LEGALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT?**

Australia is a federation of seven self-governing states and one mainland territory and, under their constitutions, responsibility for environmental policy, in particular, land management and biodiversity protection, lies with the individual states (Hodgman, 2004). As we have seen above, the Federal Government’s first foray in developing environmental policy was the National Parks System in the 1970s and
the environment first became a party political issue in the Whitlam election campaign (Wellman, 2002). In fact, Moss Cass became the first federal Minister for the Environment (1972-1975) and was responsible for using federal powers to overturn state legislation in order to stop the proposed damming of the Franklin River by the Tasmanian government to create hydro-electricity. This was in response to a well-publicised protest campaign by environmental groups which spawned what would later become the Australian Greens political party (Miragliotta, 2010).

The Australian Constitution, s51, gave the Commonwealth\(^6\) Government another opportunity to become involved in environmental policy making as a signatory of international treaties and conventions and through exercising its powers on export licensing. By signing the UNCED Rio Declaration on Environment and Development in 1992, the Federal Government became responsible for overseeing the implementation of Agenda 21\(^7\) in Australia. This convention also called for regular State of the Environment Reports (SoE) to be compiled to create a countrywide snapshot of the (natural) environment in Australia and, in particular, identify areas of concern. The Federal Government also ratified the accompanying Convention on Biological Diversity in June 1993 and published their first National Report in 1998, as required under Article 26 of the Convention (Environment, 1998). This report focused on measures taken by Australia in implementing Article 6 of the Convention, General Measures for Conservation and Sustainable Use through the auspices of the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia’s Biodiversity, the National Reserve System Program, Natural Heritage Trust funded programs, other commonwealth, state and territory legislation and the recognition of Aboriginal people’s “unique knowledge of biodiversity” and their “continuing economic and cultural interest in protecting indigenous species and environments”(Environment Australia, 1998, 2).

\(^6\) Australia has a federal system of government, consisting of a federation of individually governed states and territories and an overarching commonwealth or federal government. In this thesis I will use the terms commonwealth and federal interchangeably to refer to the national government.

\(^7\) ibid, Agenda 21 is an action plan which encourages all levels of government to address ESD
The National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia’s Biodiversity was a joint strategy between the Commonwealth and all the states and territories, set up as a framework for protecting “biological diversity and maintain ecological processes and systems. It aims to bridge the gap between current activities and those measures necessary to ensure the effective identification, conservation and ecologically sustainable use of Australia’s biodiversity” (Environment Australia, 1998, 1). To achieve this, the strategy was focused on stratified areas of environmental activity: “agriculture and pastoralism, fisheries, water, forests, tourism and recreation and mining” (Environment Australia, 1998, 1) with the aim that dedicated programs would be easier coordinated and their implementation more effective. This strategy also tied in with the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development (1992) and, indeed, provided mechanisms whereby the outcomes of both strategies could be achieved.

While providing a broad overview of the parlous state of Australia’s environment, the 2001 SoE (Australian State of the Environment Committee, 2001) also gave the commonwealth the impetus to “put in place some of the key legal and financial frameworks to move policy in the right direction” (Kemp, March 2002); in particular, the policy contained in the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, the Natural Heritage Trust Legislation and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (Dovers, 2013; Lockie, 2001; Ross & Dovers, 2006, Pannell, 2005).

In addition to these state and federal responsibilities, much on-ground environmental protection and planning was (is still) carried out by local and regional government, either through implementing their own strategic environmental plans in local parks, waterways and recreation reserves, in their role as land use planners and waste managers and by applying for funding through local community groups who can offer in kind assistance to work on local projects: most applications for environmental funding still rely on having community stakeholders in order to succeed. That said, local governments face financial and structural constraints in designing and addressing projects that cross their boundaries (English et al, 2009).
At the same period as the changes to the Georges River National Park took place, federal and state governments were developing environmental policy and subsequent programs to ‘manage’ the environment through the practice of what became commonly labelled as ‘natural resource management’ (NRM). This policy was designed to combat alarming evidence that farmers and governments had throughout our short history as a colony indeed mis-managed Australia’s natural resources in the pursuit of increasing agricultural settlement in ecologically vulnerable landscapes to maximise food production and export capital (Jasper, 1984; Paulin, 2002). Symptoms of this misuse such as erosion, salinity, dead and unproductive ground needed to be dealt with or farms in vulnerable areas would become unworkable with consequent impacts on employment and food production. In the 1970s, for example, the solutions to addressing the symptoms of salinity and erosion offered by the Department of Agriculture in Western Australia included planting trees, fencing off dead ground, or if that failed, buying a ‘replacement’ farm (Paulin, 2002). It was not to look at why the damage occurred as a result of damaging farming practices on marginal soil profiles and addressing the causes.

In the period up to 1989, there was a confusion of ‘solutions’ to environmental issues in the bush with Harry Whittington’s interceptor banks being just one (Paulin, 2002). Eventually, in 1989, Rick Farley (President, The Australian Farmers Federation) and Phillip Toyne (President, Australian Conservation Foundation) overcame the traditional barriers between their organisations and famously came together to lobby government and to declare that something must change (Department of Agriculture, 2008). As a result, the Federal Government announced $340 million funding over ten years to support local community environmental programs, launched with large claims for how many million trees would be planted to reverse the degradation of agricultural lands in what later became known as the Decade of Landcare 1989-1999 (Department of Agriculture, 2008). Three hundred community environmental groups were expected to form but over the decade, 2000 community groups were set up Australia wide to promote and work on Landcare in their local area (Australian Conservation Foundation, nd). The success of this first initiative in building
relationships between the peak bodies of farmers and environmentalists with
government and recognition that the job was not yet done ultimately lead to the
formation of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) by the Federal Government in 1997
(Synapse Consulting, 2000). The NHT delivered a program of funding for
environmental activities which was available to state and local governments,
community, non-profit and indigenous organisations and industry (Hassell, 2002).
NHT had three iterations – commonly known as NHT1-3 - over ten years (Pannell et
al, 2007) and was superseded by a new, even more targeted policy, ‘Caring for
Country’, in 2008 with the change of federal government (see Robins & Kanowski,
2011). The NHT was under constant review and reform in order to clarify the best
way to allocate funding for maximum benefit, resulting in confusion for the
community and environmental groups and heavy workloads to satisfy new
requirements by the various agencies and catchment councils that were involved in
implementation (Paulin, 2007). This meant that catchment councils were distracted
from their core tasks and often, their connection with community groups was
adversely affected too (Paulin, 2007; Respondent 1).

Measuring environmental change is a long, often intangible and complex process and
it has become clear over time that reporting on projects and their impact on the
environment was not simply a case of ticking boxes as to kilometres fenced, trees
planted (Drew, 2006; Ryan et al, 2010). It was clear that there was a need to report
real outcomes and demonstrate progress on achieving change on the ground by
addressing NRM practices – this real evidence needs time to develop – sometimes
five years, sometimes 50 – in direct correlation to the length of time it took to cause
the damage perhaps? However, the policy cycle cannot cater for this longitudinal
assessment so box ticking it was/is. This is an ongoing concern as Campbell (2009)
noted “our most recent State of the Environment Report concluded that our evidence
base is so poor that it is difficult to tell if we are going forwards or backwards on
most measures of environmental health” (4).

I find the idea of the policy writers knowing how to ‘manage’ the multitude of
environments we have in Australia a leap of faith, a stab in the dark, a political
attention grab (see also Pannell, 2005). This was more so as the writers knew that
government could not possibly afford to muster all the physical assets to carry out
the work required – the magnitude of the task was too great (Swan Catchment Council, 2004). The solution the writers chose was to name the community as responsible. Indeed, the community – we – should take responsibility for the environment we live in; my query in constructing this particular story is whether or not top down policy delivery is the best way to encourage us – the community – to become more environmentally aware in a way that fundamentally changes our relationship to the earth. If it is, such policy needs to be fully engaged in creating and supporting the skills and social capital of the community based environment groups to enable them to understand what is required, be able to educate others and to implement useful projects which can be easily but thoroughly evaluated with reporting on the real outcomes to the environment over time; short term funding over six months or even a year is not long enough to see a definitive change in a damaged environment or needy community (NESTA, 2012; Pannell, 2005). It took much longer to create the damage, time must be built in to measure the real regeneration outcomes (Whittington, 2002; Paulin, 2002). Projects need to be designed to restore and work with the environment, not necessarily always the same thing as designing projects that volunteers want to do.

The concept of Landcare has, by its very nature, ensured research and policy is based on larger scale rural natural resource management (NRM). The farming ‘community’ are important players as it is primarily their actions which determine the extent of ongoing rural environmental degradation or its regeneration and any flow on effect this may have on crop production and exports (Pannell, 2005). That said, urban areas also have environmental issues which need to be addressed, some of which are the direct consequences of rural activities, while others have arisen through our unsustainable urban lifestyles as we are often blind to the results on the river and the local parkland - out of sight, out of mind (Swan Catchment Council, 2004; WA Auditor General, 2014). Making the connection between how we live, what we buy, where it comes from and how it is made and disposed of is still a new idea for many. While much has been written about rural NRM, large scale agricultural extension and the Landcare movement, there is little specific research on the activities of urban environmental groups and their experience of the NHT system (see, for instance, Carr, 2002). Whilst these have many similarities with rural groups (voluntarism, environmental interests), there are some major differences (physical
and psychological distance from the environment, ownership, sense of place and scale). This work covers a range of issues that have confronted an urban catchment group from its inception, through various changes caused by funding and organisational mechanisms, attitudes to the environment and the normal wax and wane of volunteer based community groups.

As mentioned above, the NHT went through three iterations of funds delivery to environmental projects over the period (Pannell et al, 2007) and one outcome of this ongoing environmental policy development process was the creation of an environmental industry staffed by ‘experts’, many of whom worked on short term contracts and whose positions depended on the existence of the community groups through which to channel funds for salaries for regional environment projects. Campbell (2009) has described these arrangements as “corrosive” to long term community engagement in environmental restoration. While community capacity development was specifically named as a vital ingredient of the initial funding policy implementation framework (Hassell, 2002), it was not always successfully achieved or even attempted and in fact, as the funding iterations progressed, the policy writers stopped talking about building community capacity in favour of regionalisation, tenders and facilitating ‘on ground work’ (NRM respondent pers com, 2008).
Figure 4.1 Mapping the various governments, agency and community input to NRM planning and implementation in Western Australia (after Pannell et al, 2007)

Figure 4.1 (above) sets out the complexity of the relationships across and between government and community in Western Australia. Information, decision making and money were filtered through and across government, agencies, catchment bodies and other stakeholders before it made its way down to the group – the community, the volunteers (Pannell et al., 2007, English, 2014). In fact, on Pannell’s (2007) original map, the catchment and friends’ groups were not included. I added them to show they exist and to illustrate the complexity of policy and iterations they face before policy and information trickles down to them.

But, how did this amorphous NHT project work? I will outline some more of the mechanics of the NHT in the following section.
Introduced by the Federal Government in 1996, the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) was described as “the most important mechanism by which the Commonwealth will contribute to implementing the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia’s Biodiversity” (Environment Australia, 1998, 19). Much of the NHT’s funding resources came from the government’s public float of 49% percent of Australia’s wholly owned national telecommunications company, Telstra; the fact that the proceeds would fund natural heritage projects played a major public relations role in persuading the community that this was after all a good financial outcome for selling a commonwealth asset (Dovers, 2013). It was estimated that the NHT would provide $1.249 billion in funding from 1997/98 to 2001/02, to be matched by state governments, in-kind input and donations from the community (Environment Australia, 1998, 83). Its objectives were to:

- provide a framework for strategic capital investment which will be used to stimulate additional investment in the natural environment.
- achieve complementary environmental protection, including biodiversity conservation, sustainable agriculture and natural resource management outcomes consistent with agreed national strategies; and
- provide a framework for cooperative partnerships between communities, industry and all levels of government (Environment Australia, 1998, 19).

The NHT funded programs over the five key areas of vegetation, rivers, biodiversity, land and coasts and marine. These were also supported to varying degrees by other government policy initiatives and funding programs (Dovers, 2013). For example, in the case of ‘Land’:

The National Landcare Program encourages integrated natural resource management at the farm, catchment and regional level and underpins a suite of Natural Heritage Trust programmes. It embodies the principle of collective action by the community, in partnership with government, to manage the environment and natural resources sustainably, while recognizing
that individual resource managers and owners should take responsibility for the resources they own or control (Environment Australia, 1998, 20).

The Landcare component was put into practice in Western Australia through ‘integrated catchment management’ which involved working in land, water and vegetation management over a river catchment area (see Curtis & Lockwood, 2000; Mitchell & Hollick, 1993). Working at the catchment scale was important to maximize the scope of conservation projects and identifying their likely implications on a wider scale than just the individual farm, park or riverbank. However, the sheer size of some catchments predicated against community involvement, especially in urban areas where people have more connection to their immediate locality than a place even only a couple of kilometres away (Interview respondent, 2007; Paulin, 2007). To support the newly set up catchment groups, in the first NHT funding round (NHT1), it was reported that “substantially increased support will also be provided for the development of projects initiated and managed by the community on public and private land” (Environment Australia, 1998, 21). Thus the emphasis was on community as do-ers and as designers/knowers of how best to do these things.

The main focus of the National Landcare Program was at the time on “capacity building and on-ground action that contributes directly to a number of integration and institutional, environmental, sustainable production and people outcomes and enhanced community capacity for change”(Environment, 1998, 21) - easy to write but not so easy to activate successfully in the broader community. It has become apparent over time that while community groups are vital in local environments, the scale of the response necessary to even hold degradation to its current degree will need much more scaleable contributions from agencies and others (English, 2009; Pannell, 2005).

The bulk of NHT1 funding was disbursed on rural environmental projects in a fairly ad hoc manner, with some individual farmers receiving grants to carry out conservation work on their own properties and other projects identified by Landcare District Committees (LCDCs) (groups of farmers and other interested community members)(Curtis & Lockwood, 2000).
Funding for projects carried out by urban groups was also reasonably easy to access under NHT1 channelled through the Envirofund (administered by EcoPlan/CALM in Western Australia) although these grants could not be used to pay employees’ salaries or assist with the catchment group’s administrative functions (O'Byrne, 2006).

In order to coordinate input and oversight of the funded programs under NHT and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, the Federal Government appointed Commonwealth Government Facilitators to liaise between all levels of government, other stakeholders and the community under NHT1, and its second phase, NHT2. Their job was to bring regional groups together, advise them on government policy and provide access to relevant scientific information required to make good decisions. They were also a source of feedback from the regions to the Federal Government. Their role was key in the eyes of the policy writers, but confusing both for the facilitators themselves and other stakeholders (Pannell 2005). Pannell (2005) also noted that there was a general lack of understanding of the science and the solutions (if any) to the complex issues affecting the environment amongst those employed to facilitate and that this impacted on transmitting knowledge up the chain to policy writers and politicians who were also not qualified to make judgements and decisions.

A mid-term evaluation of the NHT1 program identified that at the regional level:

the collective roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of the present complement of facilitators and coordinators in the context of NHT are by no means clear. There are different interpretations of roles of facilitators/coordinators, as well as titles, within each program, between programmes, between State agencies, among the people involved (Hassell, 2002, 6).

This level of confusion made delivery patchy and the communication and reporting lines unclear. For example, when I interviewed 2 NHT Government Facilitators in WA in 2004, they were unclear about how the newly launched
‘Lend the Land a Hand’ program (2004) worked and didn’t have printed materials, even though it was being promoted in the media and I had already applied for and received pamphlets from the federal department responsible for rolling it out. This campaign was criticized by the Labour opposition as political grandstanding close to an election (McDermott, October 2008). McDermott also cites a witness at Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee, Report of the Inquiry into Government advertising and accountability, (30 para 3.19) who suggested that:

Environment department television advertising ‘lend the land a hand’ is virtually devoid of semantic content. Other than the arguably misleading claim that the current government is spending more on the environment than any other (a highly contestable political claim) it consists of frequent repetitions of the title slogan and accompanying images. It is hard to see how this specifically relates to the responsibilities of the department … This advertising seems designed solely for emotional effect.

Apart from collecting the number of hits on the department website, there was no evaluation of the success of the program in terms of how many new community members joined an environment group (DEH, personal communication 2007)

Figure 4.2 below, taken from the Mid-term Evaluation Report (Hassell, 2002, 9) sets out the range of roles attributed to the various coordinators through the NHT process and illustrates the wide range of activities and network development activities they were deemed responsible for. It is not surprising that there was confusion and uncertainty about the varied roles of the coordinators and how the community was expected to relate to and work with them. In practice, facilitators developed their own ‘on the ground’ understanding of what was required in their regions and designed their interactions with relevant stakeholders around this (Respondent 5, 2004).
Figure 4.2: NHT1 Generic roles of community support at different scales. Source: (Hassell, 2002, 9) derived from Commonwealth and State program information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>General Roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local/ Project</td>
<td>Specialists/ technical advisors; Small number of on-ground projects; Tend to be shorter term contracts; and Work closely with sub-regional/catchment and regional/ catchment coordinators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-regional/ Sub-catchment</td>
<td>Responsible for maintenance of one or more groups; Encourage community participation; Assist groups and individuals in designing projects and preparing applications; Raising awareness of NRM issues; Assist groups with planning, goal setting, project management and coordination of on-ground projects; Develop partnerships and networks; Information providers/ conduits; Monitoring and evaluation/ reporting; Tend to be owned by the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional/Catchment</td>
<td>Coordinate program in regional/ catchment area; Support sub-regional/ catchment and local/ project coordinators; Larger area – less group maintenance, more strategic directions and advice links; Develop partnerships with regional and state representatives; Monitoring and evaluation/ reporting; Raising awareness of NRM issues (targeting regional decision makers); Integrating NHT program activities and other community programs; and dispute resolution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Coordinate programs across the State Mentoring/ dispute resolution Provide Technical expertise Conduit of Commonwealth and State messages; Ensure State interests are considered in planning; Administration of the program; Provide cross regional coordination; Administer funding; and Prepare monitoring and evaluation reports to the Commonwealth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth /National</td>
<td>Negotiate funding; Communicate externally and internally about objectives, activities and outcomes; Provide policy direction and frameworks for the NHT programs; Develop Monitoring and Evaluation frameworks and reporting requirements; and Provide information relevant to the program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Local community catchment groups, like the group in this story, were encouraged to apply for funding to employ coordinators and project officers to assist them with NRM planning and advice and to take on the administrative roles of submitting funding applications, organizing planting days, purchasing plants and materials as well as, in most cases, liaising with the regional and intra-regional bodies. These positions were funded in the Perth metropolitan area through a state government
program called the Swan Canning Clean-up Program (SCCUP), rolled out in conjunction with the Swan River Trust and the Swan Catchment Centre. However, due to the fickle nature of the funding cycle, the coordinator/facilitator and other project officer roles were subject to short term contracts and periods of uncertainty about whether or not the requisite funding would be ongoing. Thus, there developed a practice of continuously applying for funding in order to maintain the status quo. This had ramifications not only for the catchment groups and their ability to present a robust presence in the community and their ability to do on ground work, but also, importantly, for the people actually employed in these roles. Every time a funding change meant that officer roles were reviewed or rationalized, more important community memory was lost (Respondent 1, 2004). Indeed, the Australian Landcare Council (2001) in its review “The importance of Landcare coordinators and facilitators” suggested that rather than reducing funding to employ officers, the debate on the future of coordinators and facilitators is about how to improve their effectiveness, strategic placement, professional and management support and skills and capacity. It is not about whether they should continue or not (Australian Landcare Council, 2001).

Collivar (2005) also found that there was some frustration amongst facilitators:

“While the facilitators came from state, regional and local levels, bringing in these perspectives on the NRM system, the shared passion addressed kept drifting towards ‘how to survive government bureaucracy - when the government keeps changing its mind, not making up its mind or making poor decisions when it does make up its mind (2).

Hassell (2002) had also noted this concern amongst participants during their consultation for the Evaluation of the NHT Phase 1 Facilitator, Coordinator and Community Support Networks:

The time period placed considerable limitations on the consultation, especially as very large numbers of people wanted to be involved in the process … More significantly (sic), however, is the volatile

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8 what later became the Swan Catchment Council and is now known as Perth NRM
emotional environment. There is a lot of anger arising from uncertainty about NHT2, the present ‘limbo period’ due to the uncertainty of facilitator/coordinator employment and the perceived loss of human capital through disruption to the facilitator/coordinator network. There has also been substantial confusion regarding the parallel process of the Commonwealth discussion paper on future community support (15).

The Hassell (2002) report is important as it sets out in detail definitions of how the NHT1 rollout was to involve the community and how the policy and its implementers defined the community that they envisaged would contribute to this program. The authors also mapped the intended outcomes for the work of the NHT funded facilitators, coordinator and community support networks – see Figure 4.3 which emphasises the enhancement and development of social capital and community capacity as a necessary precursor to successful NHT outcomes.
The authors expanded on the intermediate outcomes or key performance indicators in Figure 4.4, which were envisaged by the NHT Board as illustrating success (Hassell, 2002). These high level outcomes would require a significant amount of capacity building and project delivery if they were to be achieved.
### Figure 4.4: NHT Phase 1 Intermediate Outcomes (Hassell, 2002, 22)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Result Area</th>
<th>NHT Phase 1 Intermediate Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Integration and institutions</td>
<td>• Enhanced legislative instruments influenced by NHT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Catchment plans incorporate NHT input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. People: Community impacts</td>
<td>• Change in attitudes to NRM due to participation in NHT projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Participation in community level projects (applications)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increase in voluntary plans for habitat/species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Leveraged capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Sustainable Production:</td>
<td>• Private land with conservation covenants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landholder actions</td>
<td>• Adoption of property management planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Adoption of minimum tillage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Environment: Natural</td>
<td>• Area added to national reserves and IPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources impacts</td>
<td>• Native vegetation restored</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.5 below, importantly, sets out the definition of community which was used in the evaluation based on the original NHT1 policy documents (Hassell, 2002). This is key to examination of the term ‘community’ as used by the policy writers as opposed to the definitions given by the community groups themselves. These tables also highlight the immensity of the role envisaged for ‘the community’ in the NHT process.

*Figure 4.5: Definitions to be used for the evaluation (Black & Hughes, 2001; Hassell, 2002, p22)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition to be used for this evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>A community can be defined by location and/or by interest. The term community also applies to categories of people who engage in a particular task or function together or who have some form or identity together, though not necessarily associated with the same locality (see Black and Hughes 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community engaged</td>
<td>Diverse stakeholders representing various interests are involved in local actions (projects and networks) and the determination of local priorities and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
increased involvement in regional processes

| Capacity built: | Increased ability and motivation to make informed decisions (and do something), in this case natural resource management and/or achieve outcomes of NHT. Ability includes awareness, attitudes, skills, knowledge commitment, motivation and confidence. Capacity building implies working with people, usually in groups, to take them “further along the scale” in terms of their awareness, commitment/motivation and ability to make more informed decisions regarding NRM and undertake actions to achieve sustainable landscape change. |
| Community support: | Something or someone that assists the community to identify and reach their goals, as well as the goals of the NHT. In this case the facilitators and coordinators are the means by which community support is provided. |

The reviewers were cognizant of the contradictions and dangers in using such definitions and qualified them by noting:

the danger in saying ‘community’ as if it is a homogenous group of people and interests, except in the cases that a community defines itself as such. Who names ‘a community’ is an issue (or further, who names what support is desired in order for a community to achieve its goals). At all times, the wide variation of people and interests within communities needs to be taken into account (Hassell, 2002, 22).

This will be discussed in more detail as the story unfolds, but, for now, a view from one of my respondents who works at the nexus between the community groups and the environmental network:

When I talk about community I don’t necessarily mean the people who haven’t got a job which seems to be the inference put on community. To me, community is everybody, everyone has a job in this, whether it be being at home looking after your children, I see that as a job. It’s not doing nothing and the people who are on the dole who happen not to be able to have a paid
job are doing something, they are part of a community and it includes the people who run Western Power, it includes people who run the Swan River Trust, they are all part of the community, whether they choose to be or not seems to me changes during the day from the work community vs their home community – it is all community and that’s one of the things I have a problem with getting across, I think, when I talk about community because I mean everyone when I talk about community. I don’t mean … and that is where community capacity is, you can’t build community capacity by talking about just the people who stay at home during the day or who come home at night-time.

I think that when government departments talk about the community - and this is a personal view - they think of the community as being volunteers … and when they talk about community capacity, they talk about the capacity of the volunteers to undertake environmental work, … whereas when I talk about the community I think about the people doing welfare, the people playing sports – that is all part of it and we can all have an effect on the environment. If we don’t think about it like that then communities don’t even begin to restore or repair the damage that is done, so I don’t know whether that is an unusual vision. It doesn’t seem so to me, it just makes common sense to me, but I don’t think it is common sense and that is probably one of our problems, it is certainly one of our problems in Canberra (Respondent 1, 2004).

The mid-term review also detailed the range of funding available for projects for NHT1 (see Figure 4.6) and the types of organization that were successful in receiving funding through NHT1 over the period (Figure 4.7 below) (Hassell, 2002, 32-33). These graphs indicate that while the community was the recipient of the largest number of funding grants over the review period of NHT1, peaking in 1998/99 at approximately 850 projects funded, these projects were all in the range of $0-10,000 and had slipped to just 300 community projects funded in 2001/02.
As previously mentioned much of the emphasis of NHT1 funding was on the very real problems faced by the rural community with regard to salinity, erosion and water quality (Dovers, 2000; Lockie, 2001). This funding was utilized to redress the symptoms of rural degeneration rather than in education of the urban communities about the benefits of becoming environmental citizens and taking ownership in a more holistic manner to prevent further degeneration from taking place - addressing symptoms not causes (Agrawal, 2005; Paulin, 2002) This was commented on in the Mid Term Review of the NHT: Urban Environment Theme Review (PPK, 1999) which noted that NHT1 had not supported projects connected to urban form, transport and sustainable use of resources in urban areas, apart from the Waste Management Awareness Program. It was suggested that community education on
these themes would make a valuable contribution to changing the mindset of the consumer community (PPK, 1999).

This review also suggested that NHT funds had been spread too thin and that many community based projects received such small funding grants that their ability to manage the projects effectively was open to question (PPK, 1999). The Reviewers suggested that decreasing the number of grants could enable larger grants to be given to assist community groups to plan and evaluate better projects.

NHT2 2002/3-2007/8

The second tranche of NHT funds (NHT2) was disbursed following wide consultation with various stakeholders including community representatives and based on the various evaluations and reviews of NHT1, previously mentioned (Wonder, 1999). One of the main issues raised, especially by farmers (Whittington, 2005), was that there was too much money and time spent by groups on writing applications for small amounts of money and fulfilling bureaucratic requirements which impacted on their ability do what they saw as more important ‘on ground work’ (Curtis & Lockwood, 2000; Wonder, 1999). NHT2 was thus redesigned and characterized by a policy of regionalisation, accreditation of regional catchment councils through whom much of the money was channelled in the form of tenders and restructuring of support offered to community groups. The emphasis was changed to funding larger projects run centrally in the regions or put out to tender for delivery by organisations like Greening Australia, Men of the Trees, CSIRO, the Department of Agriculture and some of the sub-regional groups in Western Australia.

The community groups were marginalized by this and other cuts to state based funding programs like SCCUP and some, including the group, lost ongoing funding to pay for coordinators and other staff to assist in the maintenance of their existing projects (Respondent 1, 2004). For example, through centralizing and rationalizing its operations to focus on larger projects and tenders, the Swan Catchment Council (SCC) lost touch with many of the community based catchment groups. The SCC also removed some funding from the sub-regional groups which affected their ability
to support the catchment and friends groups under their umbrella. The character of the relationships between the sub-regional groups and the Catchment Council also changed with the regionalization focus and changes in funding availability, with the group’s sub regional contact, the South East Region Centre for Urban Landcare (SERCUL) deciding to operate as a more distinct and independent group which tendered for funding from the SCC and other funders (Respondent 1, 2004). This came after officers in the sub-regional group had to re-apply for a diminished number of jobs and, later, the funding for the regional coordinator was threatened with withdrawal. Alternative funding was finally obtained through the Swan River Trust to support this position (Respondent 1, 2004). This was another point at which the tension of running a bureaucratic regional group (the SCC), which was responsible for best use of government funding through funding larger projects and liaising with a plethora of government agencies and departments at both state and federal levels, clashed with the previously stated intent of the NHT to empower communities to take responsibility for their environments through building capacity, environmental education and awareness (Environment Australia, 1998).

These changes and actions were somewhat at cross purposes with government reporting on raising public awareness as a condition of the Convention on Biological Diversity. This stated that the Australian Governments promote environmental education by focusing upon public awareness, information and education initiatives, in addition to encouraging a coordinated approach to the formal education sector through “initiatives, such as the National Curriculum Statements, Australian Environmental Education Network, Environmental Resource and Information Network, and Community Biodiversity Network” (Environment, 1998, 3).

The federal government also noted that “individuals and community groups have an increasingly important role in conserving biological diversity through such activities as tree planting, weed eradication, surveying and monitoring” (Environment Australia, 1998, 12); it went on to note that community based Landcare groups “are proving extremely effective in disseminating information and in encouraging the adoption of ecologically sustainable natural resource management in the rural sector” (Environment Australia, 1998, 12). Obviously there was a level of optimistic
generalisation in their comments as the experience and outcomes at the lower, community level was not so positive.

It was also reported that community groups were able to access NHT funding to pay for projects to conserve and protect at risk sites in their local area, either through EcoPlan (a state based funding mechanism for Friends Groups in Western Australia) or direct from the NHT itself through Envirofund, in the case of Landcare District Committees and Catchment Groups (Environment Australia, 1998; O'Byrne, 2006).

INTEGRATED CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

The emphasis on regional planning for NRM also mirrored the then WA state government policy on integrated catchment management (ICM) (Mitchell & Hollick, 1993). ICM required that the catchment be viewed as a whole and that projects and solutions should be planned on a whole of catchment basis, in order to achieve the best possible results. It was evident when dealing with problems such as salinity and erosion in the agricultural areas of the state, that it was not possible to do work in isolation on one property without flow on benefits or, more often, negative impacts for neighbouring properties or water courses, for example digging deep drains on one property with saline water flowing into watercourses and wetlands further downstream (Paulin, 2002). This larger scale approach can work well for issues that are contained in only one catchment but difficulties come about when problems or their solutions in one catchment have an impact on what happens downstream in the neighbouring catchment area or when multiple agencies are required to work together to implement necessary changes (Paulin, 2002). In 1996, Young et al carried out a comprehensive review of processes in place to protect biodiversity in Australia *Reimbursing the Future: an evaluation of motivational, voluntary, price based, property right and regulatory incentives for the conservation of biodiversity* and highlighted the need for better communication between agencies and clarity with regard to program design, particularly with regard to who made the decisions, noting that:

bodies that have decision-making power will have more credibility and be more motivated than those which have only advisory functions. For example,
in the case of integrated or total catchment management there was, in the initial implementation period, an ambiguity about the role of Community Catchment Groups or similar bodies, with the community believing that they were intended to be involved in decision-making, and state officials holding the view that their role was purely advisory. This not only angered the local people, but also resulted in the groups losing legitimacy in the eyes of the people most affected by their decisions” (Young et al, 1996, np)

They noted that if roles and responsibilities were clear from the outset between community groups, agencies and governments, it was much more likely that they would gain community support and thus have the capacity to be more effective. They also noted that community groups were often better able to see the bigger picture in terms of objectives and across diverse programs than the agencies charged with delivering them (Young et al, 1996).

For example, having identified the major sources of nutrient inflow into the Peel-Harvey estuary (south of Perth), local land-owners implemented low cost changes to the landscape which successfully reduced algal problems without the attendant bureaucratic red tape (Bradby 1994 cited in Bennett 2003). Bradby reported that:

A comprehensive and detailed catchment plan would cross too many boundaries. The catchment has been, and continues to be, flooded with various plans, strategies, reports, assessments and other sundry documents, all prepared for different purposes. Local councillors report a current reading load of between 50 and 400 cm a month of such material. A “catchment plan”; a single overall document coming from left field, can never hope to have credibility amongst that sort of competition. Our other option, attempting to reduce duplication, risked bogging the catchment program down in decades of inter-agency argument over whose report and plan had precedence. Having other work to do, we didn’t need that (1994, np).

Bennett also saw a danger in implementing ICM and regionalisation in that it “attempts to form a fourth tier of government” (Bennett, 2003, 6). This, he suggested, was not feasible given that catchment boundaries did not conform to the demographically designed council boundaries and the necessary infrastructure and
interrelationships of the various councils and government agencies would preclude much useful work being carried out on the ground. This was illustrated at a meeting of the catchment group where we discussed the possibility of the member local governments funding a coordinator and their difficulties in deciding how this could be achieved equably – with difficulties raised if the coordinator only worked in one particular area yet was being funded by three or four different councils (TRCG meeting, 2005). Bennett also suggested that by devolving the task of choosing how to apply scarce funding to regional groupings (coordinated by volunteer catchment council members and agency representatives), there is a danger “that squeaky wheels get the most attention” (2003, 7) and

the process of allocation by using local, regional, state and national assessment panels means that whoever is at the table has determined the allocation of funds and the money has been spread ‘like vegemite’ across the landscape (cited in Frost, 2001).

Local government, too, finds dealing with the community and allocating funds for NRM projects complex and ‘the squeaky wheel’, that is the groups that are best organised to demand attention and lobby for support often get funded to the detriment of other ‘quieter’ groups that may have better projects (Maher, 2010).

As previously noted, the strategies outlined in the second phase of Natural Heritage Trust funding (NHT2), released in May 2001, were the subject of extensive public consultation and, as a result, a regional process for achieving better targeted funding outcomes was adopted (Wonder, 1999). Under these new NHT2 criteria, regional NRM bodies were required to seek accreditation by drawing up strategies and policies identifying priorities under the guiding themes of “Rivercare, Coastcare, Bushcare and Landcare” (Australian Government, 2002, 4). This accreditation process was very time consuming and imposed heavy loads on regional Catchment Councils. The Catchment Councils themselves consisted of volunteer board members and paid specialist employees. Although of value in terms of trying to ensure more strategic and better focussed funding allocations and whole of catchment planning, the process resulted, in some cases, in yet another rationalisation or reorganisation of expert support staff. In some regions across Australia,
there appears to be confusion about regional planning, mixed with many instances of disempowerment and disillusionment. In some regions, plans have been drawn up but the implementation phase is confusing, complex and problematic. In other regions, plans do not exist, despite acknowledgement that they are needed (Mack & Stephens, 2002, np).

This confusion had the potential to widen the gap between the conservation bureaucracy and the volunteer catchment groups.

Under the Australian constitution, NRM is the responsibility of the state governments. However, this role was subverted to a large degree by the Commonwealth Government’s decision to control the disbursement of large amounts of additional NHT funding (Pannell 2004). By retaining this control and through choosing to distribute these funds via regional catchment councils, the Commonwealth effectively reduced the ability of state governments to make decisions in this area. The state government and its agencies played an advisory role in the decision making process, but at the same time had to maintain their ongoing state responsibility for caring for natural resources such as regional parks, waters and rivers. In addition, the federal nature of Australian governments has resulted in the structure of NRM bodies differing between states. See table below (Pannell et al, 2007). NRM in Australia was like a moving feast of policies, programmes and organisations. They changed from month to month and year to year and this overcomplicated the whole process of delivery and promulgation to the stakeholder communities, as well as the research process!

Pannell et al (2007) tried to keep abreast of the changes over the period since the introduction of NHT in their role as contributors to the Salinity Investment Framework process. They found that:

A common arrangement for all States, as part of the NAP and NHT bilateral agreement, is the establishment of a Joint Steering Committee. In each State this committee coordinates the State and Commonwealth investment and commonly consists of representatives from State and Commonwealth agencies, with members and observers also from local government and regional groups (Pannell et al, 2007, 1).
As Figure 4.8 shows, the regional NRM bodies in Western Australia are non-statutory and are made up of community representatives and government representatives, compared with New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia where the NRM bodies have statutory powers over various acts (see also Robins & Dovers, 2006). In Western Australia there are several acts governing NRM:

including but not limited to the following: the Conservation and Land Management Act 1984 provides for the use, protection and management of certain public lands and waters as well as flora and fauna, and establishes authorities to be responsible for that management; the Agriculture Protection Board Act 1950 aims to minimise the effects of declared animals and plants on agriculture and related resources; the Soil and Land Conservation Act 1945 provides for conserving the soil and land resources and mitigating the effects of erosion, salinity and flooding; and the Water and Rivers Commission Act 1995 is responsible for water resources conservation, protection and flood management. Water-related legislation is undergoing review to produce a consolidated Water Act (Pannell et al, 2007,5).

**Figure 4.8 Comparison of regional NRM bodies between Australian States (Pannell et al, 2007, 2)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Title of regional bodies (and number of)</th>
<th>Statutory status</th>
<th>Legal responsibilities of regional NRM bodies*</th>
<th>Key State agency who manages relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Catchment Management Authorities (13)</td>
<td>Statutory</td>
<td>Support development and implementation of Property Vegetation Plans under the Native Vegetation Act 2003</td>
<td>Department of Natural Resources (DNR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Catchment Management Authorities (10)</td>
<td>Statutory</td>
<td>Responsible for beds, bank and floodplain of river and the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994</td>
<td>Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>Regional NRM Groups or Catchment Councils (6)</td>
<td>Non - statutory</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Department of Agriculture and Food (DAF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>Regional NRM Boards (8)</td>
<td>Statutory</td>
<td>Comprehensive statutory powers for planning and managing natural resources, particularly water allocation planning and ensuring compliance for soil conservation, pest plants and</td>
<td>Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation (DWLBC)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
animals and biodiversity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Queensland</th>
<th>Regional ‘committees’, ‘groups’ and ‘associations’ (14)</th>
<th>Non-statutory</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Department of Natural Resources and Water (DNRW)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>Regional Natural Resource Management Committees (3)</td>
<td>Statutory</td>
<td>Limited: develop and implement regional strategies, nominate member to NRM Council, report annually to Parliament.</td>
<td>Department of Primary Industries and Water (DPIW)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* All regional NRM bodies in all States have the common responsibility of development of a Regional Catchment Plan or Strategy and working with the community to do this (Pannell et al, 2007:2).

Table 4.8 above shows the structure of NRM in Western Australia as it stood at the time of doing this research. The state was further divided into six regions governed by Catchment Councils: Swan, South West, South Coast, Avon, Northern Agricultural and the Rangelands (see Figure 4.9).

![Figure 4.9. Natural Resource Management Regions in Western Australia.](image)

THE SWAN CATCHMENT COUNCIL

In 1994, the Swan Avon Integrated Catchment Management Program was set up, followed by the Swan Avon Integrated Catchment Management Coordinating Group (SAICMCG) and Swan Working Group in 1995 “as a community-driven partnership to protect land and water resources within the Swan-Avon catchment” (Swan Catchment Council, 2002, 1). The SAICMCG received funding of $4.2 million from the National Landcare Program for an initial three year period and was supported by
bodies which have since become the Swan Catchment Council and the Avon Catchment Council.

The Swan Catchment Centre opened in August 1996 and was designed to fill the role of “a ‘one stop shop’ to support the community in undertaking environmental work” (Swan Avon Integrated Catchment Management Coordinating Group, 1999, 4). Over the first five years of the SAICMCG program, the number of integrated catchment groups in the Swan/Avon region grew from one - the Bayswater Integrated Catchment Management Group (BICM) - to 15, as well as an increasing number of Friends and other community landcare groups. BICM was essentially a group of local government and environmental agency officers with local councillors representing community interests. In contrast, the nearby Bennett Brook Catchment Group was deliberately set up by its founders as a community driven group to better capture community members who wanted to work on local environmental issues without their being tied up in politics and bureaucracy (Pearson, 2005, pers com). This group had devolved from a group of community activists who came together to save an area of land from a new train line. However, despite their initial strong community focus, over the years Bennet Brook became a model of mimetic isomorphism in taking on the bureaucratic nature of its funders and the business models of its officers to its ultimate detriment. The Bennett Brook Group grew to include a nursery, a tissue culture lab and also tendered for local government and private landscaping projects. I interviewed a staff member who advised that essentially their role was full time applying for funding in order to keep the organisation afloat and staff paid. This group later suffered financial difficulties and no longer exists.

The Swan Catchment Council (SCC) was a community chaired regional committee which had responsibility for delivering NRM in the Greater Perth metropolitan area, an area of 7000 sq kms with a population of 1.25 million people and 40 local authorities (SCC, 2002). In terms of land mass, it is the smallest of the NRM regions in Western Australia, but has by far the greatest population. In its Swan Region Action Plan (2002) it notes that:

The Region’s residents have developed an outdoor lifestyle that is heavily reliant on the high quality environmental values and assets in the Region.
Examples include Kings Park, Bold Park, Lakes Monger and Joondalup, the beaches and the Darling Plateau. Equally important are the significant areas of neighbourhood remnant bushland and wetlands that are valued and nurtured by local residents. These areas provide easily accessible rural and natural landscapes which provide a contrast to urban and coastal areas. Central to the Region is the Swan-Canning estuary, described as ‘the jewel in Perth’s crown’. The magnificent expanse of water in the estuary provides aesthetic and recreational pleasures for many and is a welcome area of open space in a crowded city (SCC, 2002, 9).

Amongst its achievements, it was reported that “the Swan Catchment Council has successfully worked towards having local governments increase their commitment to landcare and to have political acknowledgement of the work catchment and community groups are undertaking” (Swan Avon Integrated Catchment Management Coordinating Group, 1999, 1).

The Swan Regional Strategy, published by the Swan Catchment Council in 2002, after several months of community input in the process, outlined the aims and objectives of the Council, which were to “conserve natural diversity; ensure adequate water quantity and quality; improve land condition; improve management processes; achieve cultural change” (SCC, 2002, 1).

The reported outcomes of the strategy would provide

a mechanism for meaningful community input into the operation of current policy and statutes. It also provides mechanisms for an empowered community (my italics) to inform any review of policy and statutes, particularly as they relate to planning and natural resource management (SCC, 2002, 1).

According to the strategy, community activity in the Swan Region was high with some 250 groups and up to 10,000 people actively involved in protecting the environment and the Swan Catchment Council recognised that this community involvement represented “a voluntary investment of time and skills valued at millions of dollars …. vital for achieving the Strategy’s goals” (SCC, 2002, 20).
However, the strategy recognised that these groups could not depend long term on NHT funding or the state based Swan-Canning Cleanup Program and Action Plan (SCCUP) and would have to become self-sustaining over time. This was in line with the national strategy for funding landcare initiatives which encouraged the generation of long term funds from private investment in order to fund their conservation activities and to employ the Coordinators who worked with them. At the same time, it was evident that without the volunteers, the bulk of environmental remediation would be left undone:

Put simply, government would not be able to provide this level of resourcing if this voluntary contribution of time, skills and knowledge was withdrawn. At the same time, there is evidence that community and voluntary ‘burn out’ is beginning to affect some groups and activities (SCC, 2002, 94).

This highlights the tension between setting community groups up to deliver government policy without having thought through the financial and organisational implications of this process, particularly with regard to transparent communications, capacity building and stress-related burnout on the part of the volunteers and their employees.

The SCC strategy (2002) listed the sort of activities it was envisaged would be undertaken by community groups in the Swan Catchment as follows:

- educating and motivating the wider community, industry and government about natural resource management issues and how all people and sectors can contribute;

- preparation of strategic and action plans for specific areas in association with state and local government;

- monitoring of trends in the condition of vegetation, water bodies and fauna;

- direct on-ground management of bushland, wetlands, streams and riparian areas through ‘Friends’ groups;

- volunteer support to government research programs;

- attracting investment into natural resource management at local levels;
• negotiation of and management of projects with local and State government authorities and agencies;

• making direct representations to local and State governments and agencies, and

• Involvement, as key stakeholders, in preparation of Commonwealth, State and local strategic plans and action plans (SCC, 2002, 20)

Quite a lot of work for volunteers to carry out effectively and at the same time needing to understand the rules, the various ‘bodies’ and keeping their members active and involved.

The Strategy (SCC, 2002) expressed the need to support the community and grow volunteer groups to achieve these tasks. In contrast, the Draft Swan Region Strategy (SCC, 2004) written to comply with the accreditation process required under NHT2, was a much more strategic document concerned with major projects and investments required to achieve these, written in the language of ecological sustainable development, noting the triple bottom line of environment, economy and society. While community groups and volunteers are mentioned in the report as ‘valued’, it was clear that the rationalisation of the Swan Catchment Council’s operations and priorities under the new NHT2 regional funding criteria would adversely affect support for catchment group organisations. Indeed, the report downplayed the contribution of community groups and the need to grow community capacity in favour of an emphasis on ‘on ground’ work and stratifying the various areas of interest, ie biodiversity, land, water and air quality, sustainable industry, etc. This marked a clear bureaucratising of the SCC activities to fit the new federal template.

The report (SCC, 2004) clearly noted the liabilities of working with community groups such as burnout, need for organisational support and queried the availability, willingness and ability of the wider community to accept responsibility for achieving and maintaining sustainable NRM outcomes.

In order to gain federal NHT accreditation, the various catchment councils and committees across the country were required to produce a strategy outlining priority project areas with an accompanying investment plan for any NHT funding allocations. In the case of the SCC, there was a marked move away from supporting
sub-regional and community based catchment group projects towards developing more expert driven activities funded through a tender process for three year projects, with organisations like Greening Australia, the World Wildlife Fund, CSIRO and the Department of Agriculture in Western Australia being successful. The organisations then employed environmental specialists to assist with the roll out of their projects. If you like, a rearrangement of the lifeboats as another layer of bureaucracy (the tendering organisations) and short term employment contracts were added to the process; of course the community was still required as participants. This change in emphasis was obviously a funding requirement from NHT which implied but didn’t clearly state to the regional bodies that community participation and capacity building were out of favour and that the main emphasis of the accreditation and investment documents should rather be on ‘on ground work’. One Regional NRM officer in reflecting on the numerous changes and busyness that addressing them required, noted that:

We have been so concentrated on doing what we need to do in the regional office that there has not been much time to examine the policy context we work within. I do know that the people who work with the community on NRM projects have been feeling the pain. Now I can see that we have distanced ourselves rather much from the grass roots. In the …region… it has been the function of the "sub-regional" groups to carry out the community contact and consultation work that went into developing the Strategy. This has not been successful across the board - has worked in some areas but not others. An enlarged administrative structure of the … region is being developed now to deal with the change that the (very large) program funding will bring. I was thinking about the impact of the top-down regional approach a bit. What has offended me are the occasions when the Australian government staff at DEH (our liaison with the NHT and NAP programs) call us and ask us to make changes to the Strategy or Investment Plan - unilateral changes.

For example - we were advised to remove any reference to Community Capacity Building from the Strategy. I think there was a change of Minister and the phrase was out of favour - "on-ground" was to be the emphasis. This
was despite the fact that the protocol we were working to in developing the strategy included Capacity Building as one of the output areas! We simply reworded projects to use "community engagement" instead.

The most recent example was a call to ask us to remove any reference to climate change in the Investment Plan. These were duly deleted, and the one climate change project was redescribed as a 'land' project (Respondent 7).

These comments provide a useful summary of what happened over the period in question and the pressures exerted on NRM staff to find ways to appease their masters (government agencies) while at the same time, working with community groups struggling to make sense of it all and to get on ground work done in local areas (see also Pannell, 2005, Campbell, 2009).

This chapter has set out a picture of some of the NHT and NRM policies and activities covering the period of this research. There have been a lot of acronyms, programs, stakeholders mentioned (see the Glossary for some of them!). Perhaps the key point from this chapter is that the reality of the NHT policy, its various and ongoing changes and iterations made for a highly complex web of relationships and implementation models that most everyone found confusing and which caused frustration (at the very least) amongst all the stakeholders from the top down.

So what about the community groups – how did they continue with their work …. the meta-scene has been set and the next part of this work in Chapter 5 will tell you how the catchment group experienced this.
CHAPTER 5: HOW IT HAPPENED FOR THE GROUP AND THE COMMUNITY

As described in Chapter 3, institutional ethnography (IE) is essentially a mapping and discovery tool which helps us to look at what happened and apply a wider perspective – if you like, supplying a multi layered background to illuminate an individual or particular group experience and to decipher the reasons why things occurred as they did – how institutionalizing happens without our noticing it and how it affects many similar activities across the space that we call society. Phronesis operates in much the same way. Much like sustainability, there are many layers of knowledge and power and reasons why, which can be uncovered and the bigger story told so that light bulb moment can occur – what Smith (1987) calls the problematic…ah ha that’s interesting. Developing awareness of how we fit in bigger systems also develops our sense of what we do and how we fit (Senge et al, 2005). In order to discover and trace this particular story, I drew a social map – a mind map of all the data I had collected and exchanges with the various players so I could see what became clear – what I had noticed; that is the core of this story.

To recap, when I first thought about this research, I thought it was about why people volunteered and joined community based environmental groups. As I looked and listened more, my focus changed to wonder how government policy and regional catchment councils (in this case, the Swan Catchment Council, which later morphed into Perth NRM) spoke about the notion of community participation in NRM and then, in particular, what this has meant ‘in real life’ for the catchment group and its members as the ever changing federal and state funding policies and directives actually happened to them. I have spoken about the bigger picture in preceding chapters. In this chapter I will map how the group operated, how they fitted, or not, in the NRM system and their experience of this told through the eyes of key informants and documents.
I knew about the group because I lived in their catchment. I was a ‘lurker’ following their activities through reports and minutes of meetings as a contact on their email list. An interested community member, I did not identify myself as a member of the group, per se. Through this casual observation, I also heard recurring references to changes in government policy and uncertain funding for staff over the period and I wanted to know how becoming employers and the ongoing uncertainty about employing staff and yet still hoping to design and carry out projects on the ground had affected what started out as a ‘community group’.

I tell the group’s story through their (hi)story and their relationships with other similar groups, the sub-regional group (SERCUL), the Swan Catchment Centre (later the Swan Catchment Council and now Perth NRM) and, at a distance, the state and federal government, the policy writers. In keeping with an IE focus, I quote the language used by the actors when they write or speak about working with community members in operationalising (or institutionalising) NRM and, alongside them, the stories of the community actors gained from survey, interviews, focus group and the group’s minutes and publications. Telling this according to a timeline and incorporating all the layers is complex and to simplify this task, I have picked some key parts of the story to explore which, on reading, will paint a snapshot of what occurred.

When I was observing and recording this story, I noticed there were a wide variety of groups, organizational styles and levels of activity within the Swan region which shared some common experiences with the way that NHT was administered. Not the least of their conundrum was dealing with ongoing funding changes brought about by higher level policy changes with constant reinvention of the wheel in terms of targets and delivery and, in the process, the institutional isomorphing of ‘community’ (Di Maggio & Powell, 1991). I will talk about this throughout the story as it occurred. This is the catchment group’s story to 2008.

WHO ARE THE GROUP?

The Belmont Victoria Park Catchment Group (BVP), a community environmental group was set up in 1998, which became the Two Rivers Catchment Group (TRCG)
in 2003 as part of a group amalgamation process detailed below. The group operated under the umbrella of the South East Regional Council for Urban Landcare (SERCUL) and the Swan Catchment Council (now Perth NRM).

IN THE BEGINNING: GROUP FORMATION

In 1998, local community members interested in environment issues in the Cities of Belmont and Victoria Park (inner city suburbs of Perth) were identified and encouraged by the Urban Bushland Council and local federal politicians to set up an integrated catchment management (ICM) group in the area, which became known as the Belmont Victoria Park Catchment Group (BVP). The suburbs of Belmont and Victoria Park were important as their local water catchment bordered the Swan and Canning Rivers for much of their boundaries with several major drains feeding into the river – specifically:

- Victoria Park Main Drain
- South Belmont Main Drain
- Central Belmont Main Drain
- Perth Airport South Main Drain and Crumpet Creek
- Perth Airport North Main Drain and Poison Gully
- Small catchments of up to 10 other drains leading direct to the Swan River within the City of Belmont and the Town of Victoria Park

The Swan (and, to a lesser extent, the Canning River) is a focal point for highlighting environmental issues in Perth as it runs through the centre of the city and is regularly subject to algal blooms causing fish deaths from excessive nutrients deposited in the river silt after heavy rain events and drought. The Swan River Trust had been commissioned by the state government to develop the Swan Canning Cleanup Action Plan (SCCP Action Plan) in an effort to address water quality issues and

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9 ICM is the basis of managing water and other natural resources according to catchment boundaries rather than local government or property divisions.

10 The Swan River Trust was commissioned by the State Government in 1994 to establish a 5 year program to investigate and prepare a plan to reduce algal blooms due to excess nitrogen and other
they identified the South Belmont Main Drain and the Mills Street Main Drain (see Figure 5.1) as a second priority catchment.

**Figure 5.1: Swan Canning Clean Up Priority Catchments (Perth Region NRM, 2015, 19)**

nutrients in the Swan River. This program became known as the Swan Canning Cleanup Plan (SCCUP). See also Oceanica Consulting Pty Ltd, 2005.
The BVP was officially formed in April, 1998 “to address State Government concerns about the Swan River Clean Up Program” (BVP Progress Report, Swan Catchment Council, 1999, np). There had apparently been much talk and research by agencies but not a lot of action. The group held regular monthly meetings with guest speakers at different venues around the catchment to plan activities and learn about relevant issues (BVP Progress Report, Swan Catchment Council, 1999). In the first year, the group attracted 20 or more people to meetings and they formed two sub-committees, “one to look at water testing and the other to research the requirements for incorporation” (Respondent 3). More local people attended the group’s planting days and activities.

Both the City of Belmont and Victoria Park Councils nominated councillors as representatives to sit on the BVP committee and other committee members were active in local Friends groups or were interested in protecting nearby urban bush (Dhakal & Paulin, 2009). Over time, the group developed broader relationships with the two local governments, the West Australian Turf Club (WATC) who operated two racecourses in the catchment area), the Burswood Park Board, as well as representatives of the Water Corporation and the Water and Rivers Commission. The City of Belmont also set up the Friends of Tomato Lake at the same time.

BVP members readily identified a number of issues in the local catchment area which they considered to be of concern (see Figure 5.2 below) and they set out to develop projects to address these as well as make representations to various bodies such as the WATC with regard to the race course and effluent from the local stables.

In November 2000, the BVP defined its western boundaries as the borders of the Town of Victoria Park and the adjacent catchments. During the first couple of years, representatives from various local Friends Groups attended BVP meetings and thus had access to local government and the broader NRM network. These included the Friends of Signal Hill, Friends of Ascot Waters, Friends of Garvey Park, Friends of Hassett Street Bushland and Friends of Kensington Bushland.
**Figure 5.2: Outcomes of BVP scoping session (29 April 1998) classified according to theme.**

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**LEADERSHIP – STEPPING UP TO KEEP THE GROUP GOING**

BVP was essentially a group set up and run by interested people, some of whom were also active in other areas of their community including local government. These ‘joiners and leaders’ took on the tasks necessary to form and maintain the group including arranging meetings, applying for funding, dealing with money and setting up on ground activities for members to participate in. As is normal in a community group, people came and went and roles changed according to what was required at the time. Developing good governance was a focus for the committee given that it received some public money but it also became a frustration for some too. They received some assistance from the Swan Catchment Centre (SCC) with this:
… there had been a new set of staff at the SCC and so we’d get people who would come in and they would want to do teambuilding skills and …I think we re-did the constitution about four times …that was deflating. Those type of people, the people who came in with the experts to these groups gave us advice but your volunteers – the same volunteers - are being taken off from their friends of groups to get a new constitution done … we were taken away from why we started the group in the first place (Respondent 3)

Based on this experience, the chairperson wrote to the Manager of the SCCUP to support the provision of administrative support for catchment groups:

Recommendation 1.1 (of the review of the SCCUP program) is strongly supported. Without executive and administrative support for the Integrated Catchment Groups, the few volunteers that show leadership will get burnt out. It is better that they are left to recruit and coordinate and give advice than do all the leg work (Chair, BVP, 1998).

The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax in July 2000 added another layer of complexity to keeping the group’s books and thus also increased the burden of responsibility on the group’s treasurer. The employment of a coordinator created another challenge for the group in that they became employers and had the responsibility of paying salaries and taxes and ensuring employment related tasks were carried out. This also included relevant training for the coordinator in working with the ‘community’, run by the SCC with only limited funding available, especially for those coordinators not employed under NHT funding grants.

Catchment groups were asked to record volunteer hours including time spent carrying out administrative duties in order to show the monetary value of their in kind support; for example the NHT costed volunteer hours at $14 for non-specialists and $25 per hour for specialist or technical skills. Gathering this information required accurate record keeping on the part of the group as it could affect their ability to match funding from grants. Accurate recording of volunteer involvement in specific group activities was also necessary for insurance purposes.
There was a heavy workload on the officeholders, particularly the chairperson, secretary and treasurer, to administer and acquit the funding that the group had attracted for various on-ground projects and, as a result, it was difficult to retain long term commitment to some of these roles. The group went from just having one general community meeting a month, to forming a management committee to oversee the growing employment and financial implications of being an active catchment group. In the course of this formation process, some committee members became involved in wider NRM roles such as participating in allocation processes for Swan Canning Urban Landcare Program (SCULP) funds on a regional basis (Respondent 3) and representing the group in NRM networks and meetings. In September 2001, the Treasurer indicated that due to the increased work load they wished to resign, as did another member who had represented the group on the Swan Catchment Council for 18 months, … both members wishing to free up more time to spend on their other environmental interests.

As the group moved beyond formation with a couple of project ideas and interesting meetings, the opportunity to access funds to assist the group to take on bigger projects and the ongoing influence of the SCC and the Urban Bushland Council meant BVP quickly became drawn into the NRM network. It was an interesting exercise in human nature – bigger is better perhaps - and the opportunity to be part of decision making and exert power and influence drove the group’s development down more institutional lines. The ongoing issue for catchment groups who wished to do relevant on-ground activities was timely access to assistance either in the form of money or physical and expert support. There was concern about how best to access meaningful ongoing help for community environmental activities and in January 2000, the Chair of the Canning Catchment Co-ordinating Group (which later became SERCUL) approached the chairs of catchment groups in the Swan Region to arrange a networking meeting suggesting that:

as Chairs we have a great deal of responsibility. It is in my opinion important that we receive the support we require so that we feel confident in taking our catchment groups into a very challenging future. It is through sharing experiences and concerns with fellow chairs that our role
can be strengthened. The benefits gained through networking should never be underestimated (Hart, 2000).

Hart (2000) recognised even then the unpredictability of the policy limbo the groups existed in. This initial networking amongst the catchment groups under what would later become the South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare (SERCUL) umbrella was instrumental in later enabling provision of treasurer/accounting and other administrative support to catchment groups like BVP/TRCG through the new sub-regional centre. Later, catchment groups including the BVP/TRCG supported the sub-regional group when it came under fire from the SCC which twice or more reviewed the support framework provided by SERCUL for catchment and friends groups. Under these re-organisations, funds to employ regional officers and to pay catchment group coordinators were redirected and thus officers (people) were invited to apply for a smaller number of specialist roles, removing them from the catchment groups per se. I use the term ‘people’ deliberately as, so often, policy development and governance changes rarely include consideration of what happens to the ‘people’ involved… their community memory and expertise, not to forget, the livelihoods of those under threat but also the groups they worked with were slashed by a stroke of the pen with seemingly little thought given to change management (Respondent 1).

The SCC also later removed funding for the SERCUL coordinator role (under rationalizations foregrounded in their response to funding application for NHT2). After some politicking and vocal support by members of local friends and other catchment groups, the group was advised by the SCC executive that community groups were no longer the focus of the SCC. Instead, they were focusing on working with environmental service providers who would tender to deliver larger projects. Thus, they would no longer support SERCUL financially specifically to act as an umbrella group for the community (Minutes of meeting TRCG/SCC). After much concern was expressed and committee members and staff lobbied other agencies, the Swan River Trust agreed to fund the vital sub-regional coordinator role along with various other projects undertaken by SERCUL. As a result, relations between the sub regional group and the regional catchment council became much less close and more complex in terms of the impact -
structural and psychological - on staff and community members in negotiating the NRM pathways.

FUNDING FOR PROJECTS; WHAT CAN YOU SPEND IT ON; WHO CAN APPLY;

On formation, BVP were offered cash advances up to $3000 per annum by the Swan Catchment Centre (SCC) to cover set up expenses and to reimburse volunteers for expenses incurred in group activities – purchasing plants and equipment etc. Volunteer members ran the group, with assistance from the SCC in the form of “having someone attend the meetings and keeping the group focused. The centre has also loaned the group a computer and printer and provided many educational leaflets” (Swan Catchment Council, 1999).

The Swan Catchment Centre on Adelaide Terrace were a really good resource, but they have gone to Midland now so it’s not central. I think, looking back on it… that was perhaps the best time … without all the bookwork, without having to run wages, GST and all that (Respondent 3).

The Swan Canning Cleanup Program’s (SCCUP, 1999) Action Plan detailed funding support of $10,300,000 (59% of the total $17.5 million program) for integrated catchment management groups to develop projects aimed at reducing nutrient inputs into the river. The funding support included:

- Help to appoint catchment coordinators in priority catchments
- Develop and implement catchment management and action plans in priority catchments
- Provide executive-administrative support and operational funds to support catchment management groups in priority catchments
- Provide funds for restoration projects
- Help appoint (through subsidies) environmental officers for local government
• Implement a wide ranging community education program to involve community and raise awareness

This will raise awareness, support and provide infrastructure and funds to allow action on the ground. It will also generate strong community involvement, awareness and understanding (Swan River Trust, 1999a, np).

Again, the official rhetoric of funding provision resulting in increased ‘strong’ community involvement sounded good as a goal, but ignored the difficulty of operationalizing such a strategy and addressing only an infinitesimal part of the efforts required to make this happen – speaking and hoping things into action?

As the BVP was situated in a priority catchment, they were urged to apply for this SCCUP funding for “essential activities such as administrative support, including computer subsidies and office needs; subsidies for trainees and professional help and assistance in the preparation of plans” (Swan River Trust, 1999b). The Swan River Trust recognised

that many groups have found it difficult to obtain funds from other sources to meet their continuing administrative and operational needs. The direct funding will help employ catchment coordinators and trainees and contribute to the costs of office equipment, utilities and office supplies (1999c).

**BECOMING EMPLOYERS AND MANAGERS; CHANGING GROUP DYNAMICS**

Given the large agenda that the group had originally mapped out, it was clear that they would need some specialized assistance to carry it out. In January 1999, the group had 22 active members including representatives from the various stakeholder groups in the area. In November 1999, the BVP had approached the City of Belmont to use a vacant property in Alexander Road, Belmont as an Environmental Education Centre to house their part-time coordinator and to hold meetings. This house was situated next to the Alexander Road compensating basin where group members were working with students from the local high school to regenerate, and Signal Hill, another local project area. They were also interested in diversifying their activities
by setting up a nursery for local native plant propagation; a sign of a passionate community with big ideas but limited capacity to carry them out. Unfortunately, this property and funding for the nursery was not available. The group did receive SCULP funding for a couple of other small projects and $18,000 from SCCUP in 2000 to employ a part time coordinator.

As noted above, BVP applied to the SCCUP for funding to pay a full time coordinator and for paid administrative support, who would “establish an office base accessible to community groups and existing projects in our area and to commence our own projects” (BVP 1999).

Feedback from one of the members was:

… there was pressure (from SCC) for a coordinator and we were going to get given money for that, so we applied and I think we got $87,000 – it just jumped from $3,000 to $87,000… so what started off to be a problem of we haven’t got money therefore we can’t do anything turned into a so much money and a coordinator, but with that we had to find the skills for a treasurer and then we were pulled out of doing that to interview for a coordinator. Then the first coordinator left after twelve months to go to another catchment group…. then we got another one and all of this wasn’t why any of us were there – it was all added drama! (Respondent 3)

In August 2000, the BVP appointed a part time coordinator on a contract basis who would spend 5 hours a week on catchment planning, with the remaining 15 hours spent on other previously identified tasks and “for guidance between meetings … will contact 4 of the 5 executive committee and gain a consensus”(BVP,2000) - developing the bureaucracy.

The new Coordinator developed a strategy which identified ongoing tasks for the coordinator and group members to undertake for the promotion of the Catchment group and its activities. Other coordination duties included putting together funding applications, liaising with other stakeholders in the region, developing workshops and planning and implementing catchment group projects.
During this time, the group identified specific planting projects which were advertised in a newsletter sent to people on the mailing list to inform them about upcoming activities and to encourage them to join in.

As mentioned before, the group’s operational structure had to become more formalized to include their responsibilities as employers. A management committee met monthly prior to the general meeting to deal with employment and other financial issues. A workshop in May 2001 (with input from the SCC) identified that BVP meetings needed to be more ‘businesslike’ and that new members should be welcomed with introductions and an information pack. The notion of making better use of the technical expertise already available within the group was also discussed (BVP Minutes, May 2001). Efforts were made to become more ‘businesslike’ and to address some of the issues faced by a community group with several competing projects and a need for better group processes; the group was still at the ‘forming’ stage and needed to develop a shared vision (Respondent 3). In 2001, the group took a short term lease on a small property from the City of Belmont to set up an Environment Centre where the coordinator was based; friends groups and others interested in the environment were invited to hold meetings there.

Catchment group coordinators and project officers across the region were often people who had made the transition from volunteering with friends and catchment groups to becoming employees. Many had environmental science backgrounds but few previous skills in working with people (Respondent 2) and thus the need to develop some insight into understanding adult learning, working with volunteers, working with groups, occupational health and safety, and promotion and marketing, was identified as an imperative. As Dovers (2000) has commented, you can’t do NRM without the people, so having people skills was central to making any on ground environmental progress under the NHT program.

In the case of the BVP, the committee had identified a number of projects and local issues since their inception. Their second coordinator, employed two years after they had come together, had minimal experience of the administrative and people handling tasks involved in running a catchment group and had to quickly learn new skills in this regard. They commented that most coordinators developed their skills
on the job and through experience of good and bad situations in the course of the group’s activities. As the coordinator said:

my role changed in the second year and I spent more time as a project officer – which for me was … well I had never done this before and so you just wing it, I can’t say it any other way, I asked L, I had N out, I had D… out, I had people from Waters and Rivers out. I had never filled in an application for the Swan River Trust before, I learn it as I go, you just say yes, I can do this and you do it (Respondent 2).

The coordinator was initially employed on a part time basis, yet worked fulltime, volunteering the second half of their time, because they could see the value of the task and the possibility that increased SCCUP funding would later become available for full time employment (Respondent 2). The coordinator relied heavily on volunteers: initially to assist with identifying who was ‘a member’; putting together mailing lists and databases and assisting with funding applications. The position became full time in 2002 and funding was also made available for a full time project officer via the SCCUP. However, both staff members were employed on short term contracts based on annual funding rounds so it was necessary to constantly apply for project grants into which was built an unofficial measure of cover for paying staff wages. Unofficial, because grants were for on-ground activities, and not for paying staff members directly.

The grants available to the BVP were project defined and very restrictive in terms of what money could be spent on. As mentioned above, staff costs were not a valid use of most grant money and as one of the BVP friends’ groups found (see below) there were other costs to setting up events that could not be paid for from grants and which, thus, often came from personal funds.

FRIENDS VS ‘EXPERTS’ : ASCOT ISLAND

In 2000, one of the friends groups supported by the group, the Friends of Ascot Waters held a successful planting day on Ascot Island with 50 volunteers and 15 Girl Guides. Native trees and shrubs were planted along the walkways (BVP Minutes, July 2000). An old landfill site, Ascot Island was rehabilitated as open space by
developers and the local council as part of the Ascot Waters housing development. The Friends Group was formed by new residents keen to beautify the passive recreation area and re-establish native vegetation as well as promoting a sense of community in their estate.

You could see all these things that need doing, you’d get the grants then you couldn’t actually do it on the ground or like with Ascot Island, … did some really good work there but then found that some things like perhaps the hire of a marquee were not things that could be paid for out of the grant. Some of the grants were not practical for what a group actually needs to do. They expect people just to pay (Respondent 3).

A year or so later the work on Ascot Island was taken over by the Green Corps Work for the Dole Program and Conservation Volunteers Australia were funded to establish a small base on the island to store equipment and they continued what the Friends Group, a small number of local homeowners, started. The friends group then fell away as there was some miscommunication between the ‘professionals’ running the project and the community members who had wanted to demonstrate their care.

**USING GRANT FUNDS TO PAY GREENCORPS/CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS AUSTRALIA AND THE CREATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL BUSINESSES**

Some catchment groups - including the group - used the services of Greencorps\(^\text{11}\) which was managed by the Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers on behalf of the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs and Environment Australia. Green Corps participants were unemployed youth who worked for a traineeship allowance for 6 months, with accredited training and hands on conservation work. Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA)\(^\text{12}\) also coordinated a volunteer workforce of interested individuals who were available to catchment and local governments to work on environmental renovation projects. CVA volunteers have carried out planting throughout the catchments in the Swan Region over the years with catchment groups and local governments paying for the organisation’s

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services to supplement the smaller numbers of catchment group volunteers who took part in these planting and weeding tasks. The CVA was also more agile in being to provide a workforce when it was needed rather than having to rely on when community members were available.

One paid project coordinator (Respondent 6) who worked with Green Corps suggested to me that using volunteers to do environmental regeneration was a two edged sword as, on the one hand, projects had to be designed to fit in with what volunteers were prepared to do and had time to do and, on the other, volunteers were taking away opportunities for people to get paid to do the job - the ongoing conundrum between creating jobs for paid specialists and describing the community as the service deliverers. NHT as seed money to encourage community groups to ‘take care’ of the environment vs the creation of environmental businesses which depended on NHT and other government funding to pay staff and remain viable as a business.

CAPACITY AS A KNOWLEDGABLE COMMUNITY? TRADE-OFFS BETWEEN GOOD PROJECTS AND ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

Soon after formation, the group’s water monitoring sub-committee collected samples from five local drains at Centenary Park, Belmont, McCallum Park in Victoria Park near the Causeway, Fisher Street, Ascot Waters and Kanowna Avenue in Redcliffe. The data was collected in conjunction with the Ribbons of Blue program run by the Water and Rivers Commission with a view to establishing base line data for drainage areas and to assist the local government authority to pinpoint sources of nutrients escaping into the river:

We did it for about two years – we bought a water testing kit which cost us about $1800 and the same four or five of us were out doing water testing on a Sunday morning and then the guy from Water Corp said ‘well you don’t really need to do that because you know that the water is bad’ – really local government should have been coming to the party or we should have known that and said to local government – look can you do these tests after the first flush after summer and do it at these other times
and we would like to coordinate. Well you would have thought that the Swan River Trust or Waters and Rivers or the Department of the Environment could have worked in coordination to help with that function, but in the end, I think someone stole the kit and that was the end of the water testing (Respondent 3).

The conundrum for community environment groups was that, for the most part, their members were enthusiastic amateurs and few had expert knowledge with regard to the type of projects that the group wanted to or were expected to engage in. As Respondent 2 explained, training was vital but this did not always mean that data would be collected in such a way that it was useful. The fluid membership of the group meant that the training memory of the volunteers was short-lived and ongoing sessions were necessary every season.

We need to set up the evaluation program so that it is evaluating, it actually can evaluate. I try and keep it as, not unscientific, but as simple and do-able as possible. We do macro invertebrates –that isn’t an evaluation but more a reflection on broad change, on long term change. We do some transect stuff and we use photo studies because they are simple and straightforward … they are all things that community groups can do, they can’t do the finer points… but the project officer and I have to set them up and everything needs training. Quite often you will train the first group and they will head out that year and off they’ll go, but training is a very time consuming process and then you have to re-train another group the next year because people move on, they change jobs, something like that, it ebbs and flows.

There was perhaps understandably some tension in the wider scientific community about the value of the environmental monitoring undertaken by community groups especially when scientists were finding it difficult to get funding for their own projects (Lunney et al, 2002).

That’s a big aspect because when applying for NHT funding the monitoring and the evaluation is quite heavily weighted whereas the reality with community groups is that they don’t have time/know how to
do that and a lot of them, if they are going to do that … how many of them are going to have top degrees. You don’t need to have a degree to do that stuff, but you need the kind of knowledge to even think about setting up a project and incorporating evaluation into it, and what level, what detail of evaluation (Respondent 2)

The South Belmont Main Drain experience is a classic … I have asked the girl (evaluating the data) to be very critical about the way the forms were written up because she is the one evaluating that data and it depends on how well the forms have been interpreted by the people who were doing the collecting. So we got criticism that either the form hasn’t been clearly explained or the training sessions that we run, one of the two were lacking. I think that we had 3 training sessions to get these volunteers out and that is really big time consuming stuff. Some of these sessions when I had volunteers who were all uni students, they were all …snap snap snap …and other sessions, people didn’t pick up things so quickly. But even having said that…. I have looked at some of the data they have collected and they have missed out a really key thing …. everyone was told to go upstream but some people went downstream, so their data is all wrong… and … whether it was because they didn’t understand it properly or whatever, there weren’t a lot of photos taken …and we asked them to take photos, and that is something we have learned… that we didn’t reinforce to them “we have got the camera… share the film, everyone take photos of everything”. People were trying to be really scant with how much they shot photos of, which was really nice of them to consider funding. They would see something and record it on the sheet but they never took a photo of it and they were the kind of things we wanted recorded, so that was something we probably needed and would have learned through training (Respondent 2)

Project size and what could be paid for according to the funding available was another issue that confronted catchment groups like the BVP. For instance, the South Belmont Main Drain data discussed above was collected by volunteers and BVP members, after training, but then the project ran out of money for the data to be evaluated. Data evaluation was only done at a later stage as more funding became
available to pay experts. This raised the question of the value of such data; was it collected purely for the catchment group’s own information as an awareness raising activity or should it be of high enough quality to usefully feed into studies and projects run by other agencies? If so, training needed to be more rigorous and a more dedicated team of collectors supported who would carry out this task in the longer term.

AMALGAMATION

In October 2000, a stakeholders’ forum was convened to discuss the Mills Street Drain Catchment in the Canning Region. Stakeholders included local government, Water Corporation, Water and Rivers Commission and local community groups such as Wilson Wetland Action Group (WWAG), Canning River Environmental Protection Association (CREPA) and the Cannington Residents and Ratepayers Association. This resulted in the formation of the Canning Plain Catchment Group which was funded to employ a coordinator and received interim assistance from an officer of the Swan Catchment Centre (SCC). Again, employment issues necessitated decision making processes and management issues be formalised. Office space was also required; however the local government (City of Canning) was unable to provide this free of charge. At the August 2001 meeting, the idea of a shared facility for a number of catchment group coordinators was suggested as a possible future solution.

At the same time, the Mills Street Drain Catchment Group received a briefing note from the SCC which suggested that the group should expand its area of interest “in view of the current resources available to catchment groups in the Swan Region. Experience has shown that it is not practical or sustainable to continue with the formation of catchment groups in small discrete catchments and that it is far more advantageous for groups to look at resource sharing across a number of catchments” (Briefing Note No 4, MSDCG Meeting, 1 March 2001). Respondent 3 who was involved in these discussions clarifies their understanding below:

The BVP was seen as a very good example (of a catchment group) – there were others as well … Bannister Creek etc - but federally they didn’t want
to give any funding – there were holes in the catchments – you know, you had good ones, you had some that weren’t covered, then they were looking at whole of catchment … well our catchment wasn’t just Belmont Vic Park, it went to Mill Street in Canning, it went to the airport and beyond; so it was a very difficult time because federally they were shifting the boundaries and wanting the catchments to expand. We didn’t cover South Perth although we would have liked to have kept it local government together, but the catchment boundary was different – but federally that was going to change the way we had to grow and we started to meet then with the Mill Street Drain Group and the Canning Group.

The Belmont Victoria Park (BVP) Catchment Group had been active since 1998 and, while the three groups agreed to form the new Two Rivers Catchment Group (TRCG), some active BVP members stepped back from the new group to further their interests elsewhere. For example, one retiring member was a vocal environmentalist who left to pursue their interests in a more activist way than was possible within the new catchment group. In contrast, the Canning Plain Catchment group was still at a very formative stage so their level of volunteers were low and it was more of an agency kind of catchment group very focused on the local government, Water and Rivers and stuff like that, so it was a different structure, basically it was the agency people plus the council (Respondent 2).

The boundaries of the merged catchment group covered a large area from South Perth to Kalamunda and down to the Canning River, encompassing six local government areas (See Figure 5.3).

The amalgamation process of the BVP and Canning Plains groups was protracted and time consuming for everyone and involved writing yet another new constitution and compliance with regulatory and administrative requirements. Meetings were chaired on a rotating basis by the chairs of the BVP and Canning Plains groups, though after a short period the role fell solely to the ex BVP chair The BVP members had been through the constitution development process before and while it was necessary it distracted the members from their original purpose which was on ground
work (Respondent 3). As part of the amalgamation, it was proposed to relocate the catchment group coordinator to the South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare (SERCUL) building in Beckenham (about 15kms from Belmont). This was put to BVP members for a vote and while the amalgamation and the move to SERCUL was finally approved, “some members retained the right to revert to a new BVP group if it didn’t work for them” (Respondent 2).

Figure 5.3. Map of Two Rivers Catchment Group Boundaries

This process of amalgamating and rationalizing staffing made sense from a bureaucratic standpoint as it reduced staffing costs and reduced the number of community groups the SCC would have to deal with. However, much of the ethos around developing environmental attachment and awareness is a sense of the local, of place and closeness to your sphere of activity. By creating a larger group and moving its centre of influence to Beckenham, some previously active members of the old group felt dislocated and disenfranchised.

MANAGING MEETINGS AND ATTACHMENT TO PLACE

BVP had previously rotated evening meeting venues between the two member council offices and meeting arrangements were initially made by the founding chair.
What I found when I started this group was that you actually have to manage your group. I always organised the venue, the minutes, a guest speaker, supper …so while that was going we had a very big component of volunteers because it was pleasant (Respondent 3).

Over time, though, this became an issue for the chair who felt obligated to attend every meeting because they were responsible for the meeting place, security etc.

After the amalgamation, although still just in the TRCG catchment, the physical distance of the SERCUL offices from the immediate Belmont Victoria Park vicinity had a major impact on community attendance as most meetings came to be held at the City of Canning …“they started to meet there all the time so that’s when a lot of our people dropped off and they were arranging meetings to suit the officers rather than the members” (Respondent 3).

The new group’s projects were spread over a wider area which discouraged some community members who had more affinity with projects which were closer to home. The coordinators commented that it was difficult to maintain a community network over a large area with only a very few committed members regularly attending meetings; these members represented friends groups close to the Canning River which still actively worked to protect and promote their specific local sites like Wilson Wetlands Action Group (WWAG) and Canning River Environmental Protection Association (CREPA) (Respondent 2).

**WWAG** started as an action group set up by local residents to protest against a development proposal on land near an important wetland site on the Canning River. This development proposal was subsequently put in abeyance and ultimately new more sensitive plans were drawn. In the meantime, WWAG members started actively caring for the wetland to protect it from further degradation and the group’s long-time leader gave freely of their time to support this work. They developed good relations with the local government who supported them with tools and plants etc. They also used the group’s affiliation with TRCG as a way of connecting with the broader NRM network and furthering their influence on what happened in the region – even holding them to account where plans did not come to fruition (Respondent 5). The ongoing success of this group was its emphasis on looking after one small part of the local foreshore wetlands.

People’s lives are busy and while they may travel across the city for work may not ‘notice’ places that are at a distance from their lives and a small area of local activity
which they know well. For instance, one TRCG member told me that while she had lived in Belmont most of her life and knew that area well, she didn’t know that the Canning Weir and extensive surrounding river parkland existed until she had taken part in a TRCG stormwater drain renewal project at Liege Street – some 5kms away from her home and near to a major regional shopping centre. She had been to the shopping centre regularly but hadn’t explored the local area further than the car park.

Proximity to home – a sense of knowing and being part of their ‘place’ - encouraged members to become involved in environmental projects. If they could see it every day, walk near it and watch it change with the seasons, and working alongside local people, it was much easier to maintain the commitment. This sense of place framed a social aspect to the activity which started to build a sense of knowing and caring for others and the immediate community (Dhakal & Paulin 2009). Thus what seemed to make sense from an organisational perspective – encouraging groups to amalgamate and cover larger areas - was antithetical from a community perspective.

Sometimes it was incidental issues which seeded the formation of a group; for instance the Bannister Creek Catchment Group (also under the SERCUL umbrella) started as a couple of local women weeding the patch of land around the Creek across the road from their homes as a way of looking after their ‘backyard’ and socialising. As time went on they could see a vast improvement in the look of the area and its biodiversity; neighbours joined them and later the catchment group was formed. Their attachment to the Creek was fundamental to their developing strong social bonds of caring for each other and looking out for the people in their community. A member tells the story of an old man who used to walk his dog past the creek every day and who would gruffly say hello when they were weeding. One day the dog died and the old man stopped walking in the park. Concerned, the women visited to find out he was lost without his dog and didn’t know what to do with his ashes. They helped him to spread the ashes along the path of his daily walk which he could visit whenever he wanted to, keeping his connection with the Creek and social contact with the neighbourhood group: “that is priceless, it can’t be planned and we could only do that because we were there, on the spot regularly each week” (Respondent 1).

So, it appears that in many cases, community based environmental management is an organic process that is spurred by specific incidents or interests and is not necessarily something that can be ‘organised’ or developed through policy processes. Often these groups are very small – sometimes only two or three people active in a local Friends group – but nonetheless contributing to environmental and neighbourly awareness in their community (Dhakal & Paulin 2009). Some groups may not be
active on the ground on a regular basis but as one representative told me, they felt that one of their main roles was to “tap the local government on the shoulder and bring things that need doing to their attention” (Respondent 7).

WHAT ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS SAYING? POLICY AND STUFF

Guidelines for the 1999/2000 round of NHT funding included an emphasis on “projects that are partnerships between community groups and local councils or state government agencies …NHT is emphasising the importance of the combined approach in managing the environment” (P.Hart, Swan Working Group, 14 October 1998). The guidelines also stated that projects must be aimed at achieving results on the ground.

A draft ‘WA Government framework to assist in achieving sustainable natural resource management’ (June 1999, np) also proposed that:

to sustainably manage our natural resources, ameliorate degradation and achieve restoration, all parties need to adopt an approach based on the principles of shared investment. To do this the Government must involve community and interest groups in the setting of priorities and the development of strategies to address NRM issues. Government must also be prepared to direct resources towards priorities agreed in partnership with the community. In channelling its resources, Government, in a spirit of cooperation, will seek to invest in areas where there is greatest public benefit, as well as ensuring its statutory responsibilities are met.

At this time, the state government was committed to developing partnerships with various stakeholders including industry and the community and:

for an effective partnership with Government, such groups should:

• Have a demonstrated commitment to the principles of NRM;

• Be representative of all relevant stakeholder interests;

• Be inclusive and operate under democratic principles;
• Operate as a continuing open, accessible organisation to the community in their region or subject where all can take part in the decision making process;

• Be able to demonstrate that they are responsible and accountable for their decisions and actions (Government of Western Australia, June 1999)

Thus, community groups were welcome to contribute to partnerships if they could demonstrate their ‘responsibility’ and ‘accountability’, presumably through having a constitution and keeping good accounts.

At the same time (1998), a partnership was formed between the Swan River Trust, the Swan Avon Integrated Catchment Management Program and Alcoa, known as the Swan Catchment Urban Landcare Program (SCULP). This program was designed to support community groups undertaking landcare work, with funding from Alcoa ($1.24 million over five years) and the SCCUP. This funding scheme encouraged community groups to design joint projects with state and local governments, however, “a community group must be seen to be the driving force behind and the managers of the project” (Hart, 1998). These funds could not be used to pay salaries, apart from paying consultants or contractors for a particular task which the group could not do themselves, for example, clearing tracks with bulldozers, weed spraying or conducting a professional bird and fauna survey. So the community were designated the deliverers….the driving force.

SCULP funding was designed to be easily accessible and would fund projects for up to three years. It did not require matching funding from the applicant either in kind or in cash and covered some projects that were ineligible for funding from the NHT. Submission guidelines were put in place after a public meeting in August 1999. A two stage process for considering applications for funding was devised by the SCULP Steering Committee, which involved catchment group representatives – the community - reviewing and ranking the projects proposed in their own region including those seeking $10,000 or more.

The reason for asking each sub-region group to prioritise all projects from their regions is so that the Steering Committee can understand how
important these projects are to each region and will take this into account when choosing successful large projects (Nash, 1999).

The Steering Committee made the ultimate decision on larger projects across the wider Swan Region based on the advice of the community representatives but the sub-regions could allocate up to $50,000 to small local projects. For example, the BVP received funding for revegetation and reformation of the Alexander Road Compensating Basin in Belmont.

At the same time that the ICM groups like BVP were formed in 1999, the ‘Bushplan’ was released by the State Ministry of Planning. This plan was aimed at protecting Perth’s remnant bushland and required local and state governments to refer to and make provision for protection of bushland in all future development projects and planning schemes. Bushplan “will rely on the support of the community to preserve significant bushland” (Prattley, 1999, np) – again the community was identified as key to delivering the outcomes of the plan.

In November 1999, the Swan Catchment Centre organised Catchment Management Week to advertise the activities of the 14 catchment groups in the Swan-Canning Catchment. This was aimed at growing membership of friends and catchment groups and increasing community knowledge of how people could contribute at a local scale.

May 2001: The Department of Environmental Protection’s Ministerial Grant Scheme became available to ICM groups in the Swan Catchment, with funding of up to $8,000 to pay for administrative costs like computers, printing and photocopying. “The general intent of the Grants scheme however remains unchanged and is to fund administrative and/or group development and activity costs incurred by groups contributing to environment protection through ICM” (M Grasby, 2001). This grant scheme recognized the value that many groups had previously contributed through personal provision of word processing, time and expertise, printing and copying of newsletters and postal costs and the fact that some groups were struggling to continue these activities without additional funding (Respondent 4).

*In February 2000, there was an Algal Bloom Warning on the Canning River upstream of Canning Bridge and the Upper Swan beyond the Garrett Road*
Bridge. Public concern was raised by news reports and advice not to swim in the river.

PROJECT CHOICE

Over time, the disseminated nature of the BVP membership lead to the establishment of a number of small projects spread across the catchment, some of which were later deemed to be of limited value in environmental terms (Respondent 2). For example, the group submitted applications for SCULP funding for eight different projects in 2001, compared to no more than two applications each from other catchment groups in the Swan Region.

Given that members’ interests were spread over a number of projects and the funding body had called for the group’s financial reporting to be more streamlined, in 2001, the new coordinator rationalised the group’s activities by assessing the various projects. The better projects were promoted over the weaker ones which eventually fell away as the committee agreed that the group should concentrate their efforts on one or two larger projects.

One such project was the construction of a Living Stream at Garvey Park in Redcliffe, where the outlet of the Coolgardie stormwater drain was re-engineered and revegetated to provide a habitat for local flora and fauna as well as acting as a filter to counter pollution which had previously run straight into the Swan River from the airport through a light industrial area. The BVP were successful in winning $20,000 in funding to carry out the project and much of the work was carried out by the newly formed Friends of Garvey Park, with input from members of the catchment group and assistance in earthmoving and heavy works from the City of Belmont. Project activities ran over a couple of years and ongoing planting and weed control were required to maintain the area at its best. As with any project involving nature, it can never be classified as finished. The scope and success of this project was underlined when various group members, who had previously prioritised their own pet projects, took part in planting sessions at Garvey Park and drew a sense of satisfaction from being part of an obviously successful group activity.
They really get some feeling of closeness and affiliation as the project evolves… they are there from day one and they really get to know the project and that is one of the things about community because people get passionate about doing something on the ground because they feel part of that … that is what we are trying to do (Respondent 2).

The Friends of Garvey Park drew their members from a new housing development on the edge of the park and met on a regular basis with the Living Stream as their focus. Unfortunately, this group later had disagreements with the local council regarding safety issues, insurance and use of machinery and gradually stopped meeting and contributing to on ground activities. The ‘safety’ narrative is important but often frustrates community members when they ‘just want to get on with it’. Once again, it concerts their activity into being organized and confined to doing what fits within the guidelines set by a higher authority and, as happened for the Friends of Garvey Park, lead to their disbanding.

MEMBERSHIP - WHO BELONGS AND HOW?

Membership was a fuzzy area for the BVP group; for the first couple of years anyone who came along to an activity or expressed an interest in being informed about the group was considered to be a ‘member’. Insurance cover was validated by volunteers signing a form at each activity. There were no fees or membership forms, which created difficulties in constructing a database of interested members/volunteers and most communication by the coordinator was based on an email list of anybody who had ever expressed an interest in the group. The group advertised occasional workshops and ‘Learning Circles’ in the local community newspapers to bolster ‘membership’ and new interest in their activities which garnered limited interest from non-members.

Some attendees were university students who became involved with the group for a while and quickly picked up the skills associated with on ground work ... volunteering to get work experience (the community as deliverer again) and in the case of BVP, a few of these students made a big contribution to the group short term before getting jobs in government and other environmental groups; whereas in some
of the local Friends Groups, the level of actual participation by student ‘members’
was patchy or non-existent (Respondent 5), more just a way of adding their
‘membership’ to beef up their resumes.

In the early stages of working with the new BVP coordinator, while the committee
was coming to terms with the need for change and more transparency in their
dealings to become more ‘businesslike’, other stakeholders found meetings
frustrating and counterproductive and several invitees from agencies and local
organisations stopped coming. Once the group was deemed more ‘organised’, they
expanded their meetings again to include invited representatives from stakeholders
such as local government environment officers and representatives of the various
agencies connected with NRM, the Swan River Trust, CALM and others.
However, the employment of a coordinator and devolving of administrative activities
to them, meant in practice that actual committed community involvement fell away.
Over a short time, the group became dominated by ‘agency reps’; the pendulum had
quickly swung the other way with attendance at what later became the Two Rivers
Catchment Group meetings heavily weighted towards agency and local government
stakeholders and relevant sub-regional catchment officers with few, if any,
community members attending meetings or taking on committee roles.

The question of leadership and longevity of volunteer interest is a vexed one…. A
survey conducted for this thesis in March 2004 amongst ‘members’ of the new Two
Rivers Catchment Group revealed that while most had an interest in looking after the
environment for the future and for their children, most had little time to contribute
and catchment group activities had to fit in with other spare time and family
responsibilities. They also indicated that timely communication about forthcoming
events was very important. This was taken on board by the group and addressed
with the publication of a regular newsletter with information about planting days and
courses and contact details of the various friends groups which operate in the Two
Rivers catchment area. There was also a web page attached to the SERCUL website
at www.sercul.org.au.

To resolve the ongoing membership issue, the coordinator designed an application
form and sent it to the combined database of the Belmont Victoria Park and Canning
Plains groups (about 70 people). This membership form included questions about
what activities members were interested in being involved with, how they would like to be contacted and how often. Sent out in late 2004, twenty or so people responded immediately with a few more trickling in later on. All the member information and preferences formed a database which provided reassurance to the officers in knowing their phone calls would be welcomed and that they could target specific people for specific activities. They found that volunteers responded well to phone requests for their participation but this needed to be done on a regular basis and was very time consuming (Respondent 2).

Having paid staff effectively leading the group, designing and carrying out activities and reporting to the ‘committee’ changed how community members interacted with the group. By 2004, community attendance and interest in the meetings had diminished considerably and the committee looked for ways to refresh community interest in the group. They reduced meetings to bi-monthly and a focus group was planned for early October, 2005, as part of this research, to ascertain what ‘members’ wanted to do and how/if they were willing to take more responsibility for organising catchment group activities. In practice, the focus group was attended by four people, one of whom was a staff member. Attendees could see the bigger picture of ‘caring for the environment’ but were unable to commit to do-able ideas for how the group could work better. The age old problem for community groups of getting interested people to put their hands up and willingly take on what is essentially unpaid work was not readily solved. Many officeholders just agree to do it because no one else will and they don’t want to be responsible for the group disappearing from view. Finding a happy mixture of volunteer/professional roles is a continually evolving process, especially when it comes to who holds the power and who makes the decisions. Volunteer ‘masters’ are often much harder to work with; they can be unpredictable, have higher expectations of their paid staff and relationships between paid and unpaid can be contentious.

I presented feedback from both the member survey and the focus group (see Appendix B) to the group for their information and action.

Ultimately, TRCG meetings became forums for various agencies and the more active groups to report on activities and local government projects (which were often operational and did not involve the group’s volunteers/members) and there was little
strategic or other activity planning for the group as a community carried out at these meetings. Rather, plans for TRCG ‘projects’ were made by the coordinator and, later, by the SERCUL specialist officers charged with implementing environmental projects on a regional scale, using funding channelled through the group, as the policy required the community to be involved. One community member advised at the focus group that after three years of volunteering and being a member she still didn’t know what ‘NRM’ stood for and found the jargon at the meetings difficult to penetrate so she stopped going and just turned up to weed…

THE UMBRELLA GROUP

As has been mentioned elsewhere, the first NHT regionalisation process created sub-regional groupings such as SERCUL and the North East Catchment Council (NECC), which retained an overview of the activities of the various catchment groups in their regions and offered support (2003). A SERCUL officer later took on the treasurer role for the group. The regionalisation process also brought about the pressure to amalgamate the Belmont Victoria Park and Canning Plains groups, with the subsequent enlargement of the catchment area, rationalisation of staff and the move to offices in Beckenham. SERCUL had an active community led committee which advised the regional coordinator on projects and activities and also liaised through the coordinator with the Swan Catchment Council. SERCUL members had also from time to time served as members of the Swan Catchment Council.

The NHT2 (2003) funding round changed the emphasis from ad hoc funding of small local projects to funding large scale regional projects and devolved more of the funding decisions to the regional councils, including the Swan Catchment Council (SCC). The accreditation process was intensive and included the compilation and accreditation of the Swan River Strategy (2005). The regionalisation process was a result of wide scale community input across Australia (with the majority being rural) based on the assumption that if larger projects were funded, more worthwhile on ground work could be carried out rather than the previous scattering of ad hoc funded projects. The emphasis on larger scale projects saw a diminution of emphasis on community involvement and capacity building. It raised an interesting tension between ‘community’ promoting the need for more on ground and better organised
environmental work to be carried out and their actual experience as a result as small community groups.

Under the new provisions, catchment group coordinator and project officer jobs were no longer funded and incumbents were encouraged to apply for new sub-regional expert positions in areas such as Biodiversity, Water, Sustainable Industry; again, on short term contracts. This change process resulted in several officers with skills in community networking and hard won ‘community memory’ leaving the SERCUL organisation.

In addition to the upheavals suffered by the various staff members, the catchment groups themselves were returned to being self-supporting community groups which relied largely on volunteer goodwill to take on officeholder positions and continue the work of the group. This is notwithstanding that project funding applications still had to be ‘headlined’ by community groups and featuring their practical input to be successful. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, after the organisational changes of NHT2, a number of community environmental groups across the country existed in name only as funding receptacles (Respondent 10).

Previously thriving community groups had built up a high level of community capital as a volunteer led organisation and later flourished with the assistance of paid officers (Respondent 1). However, employing coordinator and project officers diminished the need for the community to be self-motivating and with the loss of officer support, group membership fell away with reduced prospect of maintaining existing projects with attendant time and motivation constraints – both issues which have become major determinants of the levels of community involvement in an affluent but time poor society (Pusey, 2003).

**LEADERSHIP**

Leadership is vital in any group, especially where outside funding is involved. As I have mentioned previously, employing a paid coordinator (and later a project officer) released the members from some of the organisational duties and resulted in better organised and more complex projects as these staff could liaise more effectively within the environmental networks. However, it may also have fed the notion that
‘the coordinator will do it’ and led to more superficial involvement by members/volunteers– antithetical to the original desire of NHT to have the community take responsibility for and deliver services to the environment. When the original members stepped away from the group, member impetus to maintain the level of interest and community input to group activities greatly diminished.

During the time I observed the group, the actual leadership roles were exercised by the coordinator and project officer. The Chairperson was a local councillor and was assiduous in their involvement in running the group’s administrative functions such as paying staff and signing off on reports. However, they didn’t take part in on-ground activities due to time constraints and other interests and they restricted their contribution to attending group meetings and taking part in the decision making and agenda setting process (Respondent 7).

Under the new regional regime (set up through NHT2), SERCUL allocated two of their ‘expert staff’ to retain a notional attachment to the Two Rivers Group. However, the goal was to revive community responsibility for running the group or else discuss letting it go. The group was well off financially with much grant money still to be spent on various projects, but there was real concern over how the group could continue to operate under the new model without active community support in taking on executive roles and responsibilities. The Two Rivers Group had effectively become an Integrated Catchment Management Project run by the agencies and the sub-regional officers, using community offenders groups and CVA volunteers as labour along with a few interested volunteers, rather than a community led organisation which was playing an active role in addressing local environmental issues and promoting behaviour change. At the annual general meeting in 2008, no nominations were received for committee roles and finally, the SERCUL project officer nominated as chair – ‘as a volunteer who lived in the region’. This placed them in a difficult position: as an employee of SERCUL they had access to information that was useful to the group and ideal for a chair who needed to know what was happening at the regional level, but did nothing to dissipate the learned helplessness of the group. The chair had a frustrating time trying to motivate anyone else to take action, even to plan dates for activities. Community members rarely came to meetings and local government officers had their own environmental plans
and responsibilities. Yet while the group was struggling to survive as an active community group it still operated as a receptacle for grant monies for local governments and SERCUL which required proof of community engagement in environmental projects.

During this time, the chair, in their capacity as a SERCUL specialist, was involved in designing and creating the Liege Street Storm-water Basin Project. This important project diverted storm-water into holding ponds which filtered the water before it reached the Canning River from a light industrial area. The project was coordinated by the SERCUL experts, with notional input from the TRCG as ‘the community group’. Some TRCG members spent time planting and working at the project site and it is promoted as a TRCG project on their webpage. Interestingly the sign at Liege Street didn’t mention TRCG involvement, but rather highlighted the Swan River Trust as the funder.

In a telling assessment of the frustrations of working with community groups and volunteers, I was told again that involving the community could sometimes get in the way of a good project and that it was difficult to trade off the value of a good project simply to design a less effective project which was more attractive to the community (Respondent 4).

FORMING STORMING NORMING ....

From my observations of the group over time, it was clear that they had progressed slowly through the forming stage – with the bringing together of various interested people who set up the group with support from an umbrella group and the environmental agency – the SCC; the holding of well attended community meetings and planning and receiving grants for on ground activities (Tuckman, 1977). This forming stage, where the enthusiasm shown by its inaugural members who identified big ideas for projects and activities and who took on the executive roles required by the supervising agencies to make the group conform to being transparent and ‘businesslike’, looking after small amounts of money properly and being active in the local environment was, if you like, all part of the excitement of being part of the start of such a group with big ideas for the future but this soon dissolved in the face
of drafting and redrafting constitutions; applying for and winning funding but needing access to skilled environmental knowledge; and becoming employers and dealing with the new GST reporting requirements.

It was this norming stage – applying for and receiving significant funding to carry out projects which were difficult to implement without environmental expertise, of becoming inculcated into acting as employers and managers – that signalled a change in how the group behaved and what it needed to achieve to be considered relevant as community service providers in the eyes of the agencies. It was clear that the institutionalizing of their activities – obviously large amounts of money flowing through their bank account needed to be accounted for, and staff properly paid – meant that it was no longer possible to operate on the more informal basis that had attracted members in the first place. The excitement of being active in the environment in their local patch was diluted by being ‘organized’ and by getting onto the ‘gravy train’ process of chasing funding just to keep the organization solvent. Yes, the group knowingly took up these opportunities, and were almost swept along by their success in winning grant funding but reality soon set in when they had to put processes in place to manage it which took them away from the activities they had originally wanted to do – on ground environmental work close to home. There was a need to develop a higher level of trust amongst members about the mission of the group and the directions it was taking which took some time and external assistance (Respondent 3).

HOW WAS IT FOR THE STAFF?

As discussed in Chapter 4, the community were not the only people to feel frustrated with the changes brought about by the various NHT requirements. In fact, as noted earlier, the community members were often unaware of the machinations of all the changes because they stopped attending committee meetings. The coordinators and project officers employed by the community groups in the sub regional groups in Western Australia and throughout the country were subject to regular ongoing change in their employment status. NHT funding obtained through the community group was generally for projects, not for wages or administrative staff and the salaries of staff were covered by allocations from the SCC/NHT under their regional
programs. At one stage, these programs were in doubt because the catchment was mainly urban and NHT favoured agriculture based projects.

The interim NHT coordinators and facilitators funding round (2002-03) provided particular challenges for the Swan region. The criteria for funding from the Commonwealth emphasised support for positions supporting sustainable agriculture. The Swan Catchment Council and the Swan Catchment Centre prepared a proposal for funding support justified by subregional areas and the value of agricultural production in these sub-regions. This bid was successful and highlighted the shift in funding towards a regional delivery model (SCC, 2003).

Subsequently the SCC had to revise their funding applications to emphasise peri-urban agriculture in preference to urban projects and sub-regional groups including SERCUL were set up to support the community groups acting in the space previously occupied by the SCC. Given a shortfall in funding in 2001 for priority catchment funding of urban community groups through SCGP, an appeal to the federal Minister, supported by a high level of lobbying from the community, resulted in $25,000 being allocated to SCC to fund local groups. “This was conditional on the Swan Catchment Council facilitating a process to implement a more efficient and effective regional structure” SCC, 2003).

In late March (2003), the SCC was required, by the Commonwealth, to come up with a regional model within 14 days, that is, a model that would outline all funding being requested from NHT during the accreditation phase in the development of the Swan Regional NRM Strategy, ie. June to December 2003, and post accreditation, ie, after December 2003 (SCC, 2003). The demands this placed on specialist staff at the SCC was huge and the emphasis on creating the Strategy displaced on ground and work with the community for some considerable time.

During the period of my research, employment patterns for catchment group staff varied from part time with the second coordinator ‘volunteering the rest of the time’ because they felt the volume of work would justify funding the position to full time within 6 months; to full time; to employing a full time project officer as well; to
funding for coordinators being discontinued; to catchment group officers having to apply for a lesser number of sub-regional specialist roles while still nominally maintaining some connections to the community groups – to unofficially support them and to ensure funding could be channelled through the groups as this was still a requirement to apply for government funds. Funding was always short term and liable to change as the whims of the NHT process and the state funding processes fluctuated over time. This was also in concert with the sub regionalisation process as a result of which:

I am now dealing with 5 local governments as opposed to 2. So it’s a big catchment, so I go, well I need you to do projects on a sub-regional level now so the job changes all the time and they don’t change necessarily because the community groups needs changed, in fact the community group’s needs haven’t changed in three years since 1998, but the way the government fits the money, the community groups have a staff person, that changes (Respondent 4).

Then coordinators were no longer funded and some were transposed into the sub regional positions causing confusion and disruption for the group:

Well the new thing now, which the community groups I think have every right to be really pissed off at, is they will not be directly employing people like myself. A group such as SERCUL will directly employ me so do I just work in the TRCG area or do I work for the whole lot? We are in the dark about this, because we keep asking our regional coordinator questions and they are saying to us we need to design projects on a regional basis; so we keep asking them questions to help us work out these regional programmes – a lot of it is stuff we have already done anyway, we haven’t just worded it right and they quite often can’t answer those questions for us because the feds haven’t given them the information. They feed it back in. They go to facilitators/coordinators meetings at the Swan Catchment Centre – they put all of our questions up and they give back the answers which are sorry about that, don’t know about that etc; so they can’t help us and individually how much can we tell our community groups which we feel have a right to know. Particularly BVP because it is so emotional, because they took the choice to
merge together, this whole regional thing came out in the second year that I
was working for them and the opportunity to merge the two groups was one
option, another option for BVP – we had a workshop to discuss the options –
to split, to stay as they are, to do all this kind of stuff and I tried to include
the group and workshop all these decisions on minimal information from the
Swan Catchment Centre at the time and they were working on minimal
information from the government and the end result was that the group
decided to merge with Canning Plain (Respondent 2).

Following the sub regional changes and the regionalisation process which required
catchment based initiatives, the group’s boundaries were further expanded, making
the development of a sense of place or any control over the group’s activities very
difficult

I had a feeling that the signs were leading to that and extending the
boundaries up to Kalamunda because 3 or 4 catchments in Belmont all start
in Kalamunda and there were a couple of catchments in Canning which start
in Kalamunda as well, so Kalamunda was an obvious link if you are doing a
boundary based on geographical and catchment stuff. So they have just gone
through this whole year and of course there is a massive amount of
administration that goes on with all this, a new constitution had to be written,
election of office bearers which is happening next month, choosing where the
meetings are going to be held and all the closure of the Landcare stuff just
goes on bloody hold. It is really hard to do everything (Respondent 2).

Later (2005), as the changes and the natural course of joining and leaving left its toll
on the group, I took the following notes from a meeting with a coordinator:

The difficulty with a non-functioning CG is that government funding is
funneled through the community CG and community participation in the CG
is a requirement to get such funding. They expressed the concern that
sometimes projects had to be designed to cater for what ‘the community’
wanted to do rather than for work in a higher priority area. Thus there is a
piecemeal effect on projects submitted for funding. Money was not an issue
as most if not all funding applications by the group had been successful but they felt that often higher priority projects were not able to be tackled because the community expressed little interest in them.

One of the major issues of the group was that it now covered such a large area and it was very difficult to maintain community interest. Most community members would prefer to work on a more local scale (Respondent 4).

In addition, the regionalisation process by the SCC meant less funding was available for community and, in effect, devolved that concern to sub regional groups to the point where the group was advised that ‘community and capacity building was no longer being supported by the SCC’ or seen to be a priority (minutes of TRCG meeting with SCC representatives, 2008). Emphasis was now on the tendering process and the creation and funding of larger projects which could be run by specialist environmental organisations and reported on using tick boxes: how many kilometres of fencing had been put in place, how many trees planted; short term measuring of work that might take years to prove useful or not (Drew 2008).

As noted earlier, funding for the sub regional coordinators role was also under threat twice during the time I was observing the group and was only stabilized by funding from the Swan River Trust, a state based environmental agency and the ‘winning’ of a couple of the regional tenders. The Swan River Trust has now been subsumed into the WA Department of Parks and Wildlife (2013) and it is not clear how this will affect financial support for the sub-regional group and community projects.

SERCUL has found ways over time to adapt to the changing funding models and has been ably lead by its coordinator and management committee to become a viable ‘environmental business’, winning government and other funding, employing specialist officers and developing a corps of volunteers who have been trained by the organisation and who they utilise to do on-ground work for their various projects. This has proved to be a workable model of engaging in environmental protection through ‘expert’ planned projects implemented with the help of a trained volunteer group who turn up when required and do not have to become embroiled in committees, constitutions and funding applications (Respondent 1 2013).
As Cote (2001) suggested, ideally government funded social protection programs should be more like trampolines than hammocks. Government policy was always that the NHT funding was merely an encouragement to initiate and to support active community projects to increase environmental awareness and take up of new practices - a trampoline (SCC, 2004). However, in practice, the structure of assistance to such groups through providing coordinators and building environmental bureaucracies - the hammock - did not result in the wished for vibrant, independent and self-supporting community groups on the broader scale. Yes, there are some groups who have flourished in a small space, but there are many more that exist in name only or with only one or two members. When a passionate leader moves on to other things, gets burned out or finds it too hard to continue with little support from other members or too many administrative hurdles, another patch of ground loses its carers.

Further the community’s hammock developed holes caused by ongoing changes to government funding, staffing and regional governance structures. For the volunteers in some community based catchment groups, these holes are stretched too big to mend. The group had to review their mission and reduce their activities several times over the years to fit more closely with what was possible for them to achieve with only a few people and available resources (Respondent 12, 2011). Their hammock was stuck precariously for a year or more in the transition from being an expert led organisation to becoming a community group again, albeit with its most active volunteer members also being environmental experts in their paid work. Eventually a community member took on the role as chair in 2010 and the group acts now as an information conduit between the sub-regional group and their membership of small friends groups (Respondent 12, 2011).
This case study revealed that the group was initially interested and passionate about creating and working on environmental projects on a small local scale for which they could take responsibility. Their sense of place and generalised trust (Uslaner, 2002) was derived from regular meetings and local on-ground activities which increased social connection and social capital. This was impaired when the groups amalgamated. Unlike professional organisations, the very nature of a community group is fluid over time and is subject to abrupt change depending on the commitment and availability of members to maintain it.

Becoming employers introduced more complexity and oversight responsibilities for group members, especially the treasurer, which changed the tenor of the group from being a group of people interested in the local environment to a more bureaucratic ‘business like’ entity with a new management committee. It also led to other members being less involved in the day to day, ‘as someone was being paid to do it’. This was complicated by the ongoing changes to the NRM roll out in Western Australia in particular with regard to uncertain funding for the group’s staff and its place in the NRM sphere.

With the various iterations of NHT and the requirement for the SCC to develop investment programs, regional plans and bigger projects, there were obvious tensions at the higher levels of the regional NRM bureaucracy about the value of community groups, evidenced by the downplaying of community in the 2004 Regional Plan (SCC 2004). In turn, the community experienced a loss of trust in the regional council due to feeling ‘out of the loop’ and not appreciated.

For the professional staff (employed by the group and those who were attached to the sub-regional group), there was a lack of clarity and communication with the regional council with regard to ongoing operational changes. This was mainly due to miscommunication and the fact that the SCC was required to reformulate its policies and programmes on an ongoing basis to respond to the new funding iterations and was not always able to respond to requests for up to date information. Employees of the community groups and the sub regional groups were also subject to uncertain job
prospects as funding was short term and liable to change in ways that were beyond their control.

The sub regional group and group coordinators had to translate NHT directives and apply them to the community groups they worked with in a way that would create ‘good projects’ and interest volunteers/members enough to commit time and effort to completing. This also highlighted the issue of environmental experts needing to learn on the job about working with community and volunteers; liaising with the NRM/NHT network; and the level of ongoing volunteer training required by a changing stream of members volunteering to carry out surveys and collect data which would be useful to other users.

What was also very clear was the high sense of duty exhibited by the officers in the sub region to support the community groups, especially when funding was withdrawn for coordinators and, even, the sub regional coordinator at one time.

Chapter 6 will examine some of these issues in the wider context of neo-liberal policy making and the foggy nexus between bureaucracy, policy and working with community in the real world.
CHAPTER 6: MAKING CONNECTIONS

OVERVIEW

The style chosen to write this work is deliberate and graphically represents some of the confusions and (mis)understandings that people on the ground, the do-ers, the group experience when dealing with government and bureaucracy. This chapter will examine the meta issues which arose in the data collected through the IE process with the Group (see Chapter 5) with reference to a broader literature: the connections between public policy, community as active citizens and service providers; bureaucratizing community; and, the factors such as trust and social capital that are integral to the success (or not) of involving community in the NHT/NRM and similar experiments. These are also viewed through the frame of how the big picture ‘texts’, policies and ideas concerted social relations by those who experienced them (Smith, 2007). The following diagram (Fig 6.1) sets out the various discussion points to be addressed in the context of the group and the wider NRM picture.

Figure 6.1: Overview of Discussion Points
In particular, I will touch on some of the meta ideas about how governments frame community as contributors and service deliverers through policy making and provision of funding. The concepts and examples cited may not, on the surface seem linked, but they all contribute to the complex jigsaw that has arisen in this research and around the NHT and community action for NRM, in particular. *I note here that this work draws together the ideas to make things visible rather than exploring them all in depth.* Ultimately, then, how does the framing of community action through creating a dependence on government funding and its attendant bureaucracy do the community a dis-service by ‘calcifying’ the process and how do the ‘do-ers’ experience this?

**POLICY MAKING – THE POLICY CYCLE**

To start at the beginning, the NHT was designed to deliver government environmental policy and thus a broader examination of how policy works is important as this has clearly framed the experience over the study period and beyond.

Policy decisions are more often than not reactive and drafted consequent to an unexpected incident or for political expediency (Davis et al 1990; Colebatch, 2006). Salinity was a major issue when the Decade of Landcare was first mooted and thus Bob Hawke’s promise to plant six million trees. Once a decision has been made, the time allocated to designing and implementing the policy is often very short and inevitably the resultant policy has imperfections and contradictions. It is impossible for policy to provide concrete solutions to all the problems which may arise (Davis et al, 1990, Thomas, 2005). These issues are generally ironed out in practice by the various bureaucrats charged with implementation who, when faced with a contradiction or uncertainty make informed judgments as to the intent of the particular policy in particular situations (McLeod & McCulloch, 2002; Raco, 2002). Over time, these judgments form part of the evaluation process and contribute to future policy refinements (Davis et al, 1990).

Dale (2001) suggested that given the speed with which policy is developed in response to political triggers, it follows a pattern of what worked before and thus “analysis is sharply limited to alternatives that differ very little from the status quo.
Policy is made iteratively, by trial and error, with minimal influence on theoretical knowledge” (105).

Policy is thus built on rules and existing regulation. Like science, the bureaucratic policy process professes to be neutral ‘views from nowhere’ and in the public interest (Raco, 2002; Young, 1990). Inter or, even, transdisciplinarity is rarely found in bureaucracies due to the various ‘silos’ and ‘stovepipes’ which exist to make departmental and the various levels of government boundaries impermeable. Thus, policy is more often than not developed according to the advice of narrow specialisms and the circumscribed ambit of the particular department authoring it – which minister got asked the question that needed to be answered (Dale, 2001).

This is not just as a consequence of the power structure in bureaucracies and the way people are employed within them, but is also indicative of the segmented manner in which universities, science and the professions operate and consequently the advice they pass on to bureaucrats reflects their own various ‘realities’ (Vig & Kraft, 1990).

The traditional bureaucratic hierarchy is the antithesis of what Dale (2001) called “horizontal collaboration” across departments and agencies or with non-government stakeholders – the ideal of those working in the sustainability sphere (Head, 2008; Hopwood et al, 2005). Public servants are more likely to ‘serve’ their minister first and the public second. Thus, where an ethos of regulation, control and rationalisation is the norm, the ‘silo’ effect is most pronounced. The risks associated with collaboration with other departments or non-government stakeholders in terms of time and perceived loss of power or control may appear to outweigh the benefits that could accrue in more broadly focused policy design and implementation. Disturbingly, Dale (2001) cited her experiences in Canada:

There were clearly significant gaps between rhetoric and action. I began to perceive the influence of prevailing paradigms, myths and metaphors as well as the powerful vested interests committed to maintaining the status quo… Increasingly, I noticed that issues of power and control, as well as individual psycho-dynamics, were key features of decision making and that they operated at all levels within the system (97).
This points to a need for more and better integration and collaborative practices to design policies that reflect ‘real life’ solutions – life is a complex system, not a 2D bounded idea. ‘Real life’ is not segmented to neatly fit the parameters of this or that government department’s ambit or, indeed, the ‘disciplining’ of academics. As noted above, policy solutions are generally designed in the silo of what a department ‘knows’, rather than broadening their view - seeing the bigger picture - of what could make it better by engaging with other stakeholders, including other departments.

Multiple insights, methods, worldviews and disciplinary perspectives would allow us to become more aware of the complexity of social and ecological systems as well as the difficulties of taking appropriate actions (Dale, 2001, 152).

Edwards (2005) agreed and posited some reasons why social scientists and policy practitioners do not always work together well, including the difficulty in translating academic research for easy transfer to policy deliberation and research data not being tailored to specific policy issues. This is not a one way argument. Policy makers usually have to act quickly and may fail to engage with what research can provide until it is too late to make a difference and how do they choose whose research they prioritise over others? The additional issues of political expediency and finance allocation can result in ad hoc policy decisions regardless of the research – power and rationalisation (see also Flyvbjerg, 1987). Edwards concluded that:

The degree to which research influences policy often depends on individuals building relationships of mutual trust and respect, rather than on an ongoing and sustained discourse between governments and researchers. If Australia’s capacity for policy innovation is to be sustained, research needs to be something much more than a mere afterthought or a post hoc justification for a predetermined policy position. The long term benefits to research and to public policy are too important for there not to be a systematic and sustained effort to bridge the divide between them (2005, 73).

In addition to academic research per se, there is also a need for policy framers to take community and stakeholder consultation more seriously than a box ticking
engagement exercise (Simpson & Bretherton, 2010). Again, too, it requires good translation – someone who understands the jargon and can interpret for all stakeholders. Colebatch (2006) identified a new “focus on policy … seen as a counter to the functionalist inertia of institutionalised technical expertise: for instance, by not posing the question as ‘How do we build another dam to satisfy the rising demand for water?’ but as ‘Is building another dam the best way to bring supply and demand into alignment?’” (2006, 3).

He suggested that policy specialists with this bigger picture or systems view could serve as a useful buffer between a minister and their specialist department and perform the role of breaking down the silo mentality of technical specialists and civil servants (Colebatch, 2006; Dale, 2001), translating their capacity into policy that addresses the concerns of the day on a more broad based systems level. It remains to be seen if this model of policy development has been broadly adopted (Colebatch, 2006). Changing the way the questions are asked will create alternative ways of addressing the issues and highlight the need to consider causes not just symptoms.

In defence of public servants, their funding is competitive, resources are finite and subject to ongoing reductions in order to support other government priorities at all levels (Davis et al, 1990). Thus, policy development is designed to satisfy a perceived need to be seen to be doing something and inevitably there is never enough funding or other resources, such as knowledge or commitment by others, to ensure that government policy can ever really be the answer to everything (Davis et al, 1990).

For instance, public health campaigns (and the work of the NHT) publicise government messages to as large an audience as possible. It is, however, vital for these campaigns to tread the narrow path between engaging with, not diminishing, individual agency and our responsibility as active citizens (Pusey, 2003). Despite the government having spent millions of dollars funding environmental regeneration projects and messages over the past 25 years, it is clear from current reporting (see for example Perth NRM, 2015) that, even now, the key performance indicator of an engaged broader community who understand that personal actions resonate and can be detrimental to the environment has not been achieved and continues to be identified in the ‘vital’ and ‘desirable’ categories in reports and strategies. What
Dale stated in 2001, is still true for many individuals, businesses and governments today in 2016:

We deny the existence of limits because recognising biophysical limits means facing our own mortality. Recognising that there are limits to the earth means accepting that there are limits to our being and to human activities. And because we perceive our human activity systems to be apart from natural systems, few of us really believe that what we do to the biosphere, we also do to ourselves (xii).

The difficulty in formulating environmental policy is that inherent environmental values conflict with traditional economic considerations (Crowley, 1992; Dale, 2001; Dovers, 2000; Thomas, 2005). Political power is invariably determined by the strength of the economy, thus prioritising industrial expansion and job creation over any detrimental consequences to the environment or to social justice. In order to counter economic objections to making environmentally friendly decisions, environmental lobbyists have become more sophisticated, their campaigns more professional and supported by economic analysis to strengthen the environmental case (Sinclair, 1998). High profile environmental campaigns have been instrumental in persuading some large corporations to voluntarily commit to reducing emissions with no apparent loss of employment or damage to their balance sheet and without government regulation. In fact, for most of these companies, incorporating triple bottom line accounting and environmentally friendly business practices has served to increase their profitability. As Hawken lamented as far back as 1977:

“Conventional economic themes will not guide our future for a simple reason. They have never placed “natural capital” on the balance sheet. When it is included, not as a free amenity or as a putative infinite supply, but as an integral and valuable part of the production process, everything changes. Prices, costs, and what is and isn’t economically sound change dramatically” (1977, 42).

Our future sustainability as a civilisation requires building holistic relationships between the economy, the environment and society and the necessity of taking concrete action to integrate all the capitals (social, human, natural, financial,
manufactured and intellectual) in corporate and government operations not just as a few lines quoted in corporate social responsibility statements (Mulgan, 2012; Gleeson-White, 2014). Communities can be instrumental in this change through the growth of social movements and education which engage people with their causes (Hawken, 1993, 2008). Government can also contribute by becoming more collaborative:

The collaborative relationship between the public service agencies and non-government organisations that together deliver government programs should be founded on appreciation of the constraints under which all sides operate, mutual respect, reciprocated trust, authentic consultation, and a shared recognition of common purpose’ (Shergold 2013, 17).

**THE ISSUE ATTENTION CYCLE**

Figure 6.2 sets out the issue attention cycle which Downs (1972) devised to illustrate the policy development process described above and the inherent waxing and waning of public attention and government response.

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**Figure 6.2: Issue Attention Cycle (Downs, 1972; Thomas, 2005)**

**RE-EMERGENCE**
Problem appears in a slightly different form

**PERIOD OF SELECTIVE AWARENESS**
Researchers find problems, government officials and/or company executives may know

**PERIOD OF ALARM OR CONFLICT**
Media publicises issue, public become concerned, action is called for

**PERIOD OF REASSURANCE**
Public is reassured by government action and promises that the problem is in hand, but change may be symbolic leaving the cause of the problem untouched.

**PERIOD OF ACTIVITY**
Government holds inquiries, passes legislation, generally appears to be doing something

**PERIOD OF NON INTEREST**
Problem is assumed solved, media is disinterested
While environmental policies undergo regular rejigging according to the current phase of the attention cycle and shade of government in power, old solutions (‘wheels’) are regularly reinvented as part of the cyclic nature of policy formation - replications of past programs and ideas which were forgotten once their policy cycle had elapsed. The ‘issue attention cycle’ necessarily perpetuates short term policy responses to stimuli and it is a feature of the bureaucratic model that previous research and the outcomes of similar programs are not often revisited, but rather re-invented, with little evidence of long lasting benefit or successful implementation (Hodgman, 2004; Paulin, 2002, Thomas, 2005).

‘Real life’ issues such as salinity and polluted rivers caused by landclearing and planting on fragile soils were identified by experts and agencies during a *period of selective awareness* some time before they were addressed by governments during the ‘*period of alarm or conflict*’. Short term solutions were based on promising money and making big statements, for example, Bob Hawke’s election promise to plant one billion trees, in order to be seen to be doing something doing the *period of activity* which lead to the *period of reassurance* when, yes, some trees had been planted but equally large tracts of land were cleared at the same time, neutralising the beneficial impact of the tree program. During the *period of non-interest*, the public felt reassured that something was being done and lost interest. Then, a new government announced in 2014 that 20 million trees would be planted by 2020\(^\text{13}\) to assure voters that they are tackling climate change in a better way than the previous government did through levying a carbon tax:

The Programme has four strategic objectives:

- **20 million trees** – 20 million trees and associated understorey planted by 2020.
- **Environmental conservation** – support local environmental outcomes by improving the extent, connectivity and condition of native vegetation that supports native species
- **Community engagement** – work cooperatively with the community
- **Carbon reduction** – contribute to Australia reducing its greenhouse gas emissions”


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Thus, not a lot has changed in how government policies message environmental degradation over the iterations of Landcare, NHT and the later version, Caring for Country (see Robins & Kanowski, 2011; Curtis & Race, 1997). In terms of previous ‘experiments’ to involve community over the period of this thesis, the various stages of the NHT and state government funding programs have successively:

- funded community environmental projects;
- created employment for environmental professionals;
- redesigned jobs;
- removed jobs;
- and, redirected funding and attention away from the community.

This resulted in an ongoing loss of intellectual knowledge and community memory and ensured that the emphasis for those still employed was in ensuring funding for their next short term contract (Respondent 1, 2006; Robins & Kanowski, 2011). The gaps in support for community-designed activities were not noticeable to the general public and those not engaged in Landcare (Respondent 1, 2006). Communications between the catchment council and the community groups were silenced and general public interest in the topic waned – ‘non-interest’.

Commonwealth Government funding was allocated to various Landcare and Water Quality Programs which advertised the government’s commitment of funds to tackle salinity, small grants were made to community groups and regional catchment groups, and through the Commonwealth scheme “Lend the Land and Hand” (2004) which continued the ethos of the Decade of Landcare by encouraging the public to join community based Landcare and catchment groups. By publicizing their response in this way, the government to some extent ‘reassured’ the public that the solutions to the problems are in ‘hand’. However, the success of the Lend the Land a Hand campaign was not measured, other than by the number of ‘hits’ on the website\(^\text{14}\).

\(^{14}\) The total cost of the Lend the Land a Hand campaign was $5,117,623. Targeted at 25-54 year olds, tracking research showed unprompted recognition of the advert was 10%, prompted recognition was
At the same time, the structural changes imposed on regional landcare groups and catchment councils in order to qualify for later tranches of NHT funding (NHT2 and later NHT3 and Caring for Country) created large gaps, particularly where ongoing community engagement and capacity building were concerned. Regional Catchment Councils reported that they had to divert so much time and attention to completing investment plans, that they had no time or funds to design and implement projects or divert to community groups wishing to do the on ground work (Robins & Kanowski, 2011; Robins, 2009; SCC, 2004). The Regional Catchment Councils had to be more pragmatic about assessing priorities and the best way to deliver funding and environmental outcomes. Federal funding under NHT2 engineered a move away from projects carried out by the group and their peers to instead allocate funding by tender to groups like World Wildlife Fund and Greening Australia, larger non-profits that designed and ran more finite landcare projects with an outcomes reporting requirement and with minimal long term participation by community stakeholders required. Some of the sub-regional catchment committees including SERCUL also tendered for and won funding for the employment of environmental expertise and to carry out sub-regional catchment level programs.

INSTITUTIONALIZING THE COMMUNITY – CONCERTING SOCIAL RELATIONS

A major commentary throughout my data collection was for community groups to become more ‘businesslike’ and through becoming part of the NHT network process, to ‘build their capacity’ to contribute in a way that would comply with the NHT ‘program’. This reflected the concerns of Smith (2007) who identified the concerting of social relations through compliance, visible or invisible as detrimental to the subjects being concerted. Where is the nexus between being ‘organised’ and just enjoying work on the ground/in the community?

60% and 50% of those who remembered the advert recalled the ‘hand’ used in the advert. Website hits went up from 1000/month to 25,000/month during the 8 weeks of the campaign and of those who recalled the advert, 86% supported the message. There was no research as to how this translated to participation in environment groups as a result (DEH, personal communication February 2006).
Colebatch (2006) found that charitable, non-government organizations and interest groups were institutionalized through the development of government frameworks and policies which claimed to represent the standard expected of, say, health services or education, even though the government did not necessarily fund these groups’ activities. This ‘officialising’ or ‘standardising’ of the various organizations in the sector provided the basis for strengthening risk management by the government and subsequent moulding of the parameters of what they expected the sector to provide with or without government funding (see also Stears, 2012). Consequently, this “gradual integration of the non-official into the official has implications for the activities and the character of the non-government organizations” (Colebatch, 2006, 23). In order to relate to government, non-profits and community benefit organisations had to become just as proficient at policy development and research and adopt the behaviours predicated by the government organisations which supported them - what DiMaggio and Powell (1991) called ‘institutional isomorphism’ or what Smith (2007) would callconcerting the activities of the organisation through texts and policies which might ultimately serve to distance the non-profits from their original mission and support base. “There were questions about whether becoming this closely involved with government was compatible with their advocacy on behalf of their constituents” (Colebatch, 2006, 23). This raises the conundrum of whether it is possible for community groups to retain their essential voluntary and interest based character if they decide to become involved with government provisioning or programs like NHT, both at the larger, not-for-profit organisational level and also at the smaller, local community level.

A parallel debate about the professionalization by proxy of non-profit support groups occurred in the United Kingdom. These ‘user groups’ were encouraged to participate in consultation with providers so that their needs and perspectives were better understood (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001; Richardson, 1983). This participation was problematic for some in terms of understanding who held and exercised power, who was representative and the way in which the consultations were directed to achieve bureaucratic ends (see also Flyvbjerg,1998). Cornwall and Gaventa described how a ‘third option for social policy’ progressed to talking “about participation not only in terms of having a say and being involved in the delivery of existing programmes, but also about more active participation in provisioning and in
policy formulation” (2001, 4), (see also Hartz-Karp and Newman, 2006; Cooke & Muir, 2012). However, once the user groups were identified as ‘service providers’, the relationship context became more complex and as Barnes (1999) suggested:

> Once user groups engage in dialogue with producers of public services they enter the territory of public service decision-making. It is at that point that the issues of identity and governance come together in the tension around the disputed identities of ‘consumer’ or ‘citizen’ (82).

This tension around identity was further complicated by the fact that the user groups, in specialist support areas like mental health or stroke prevention, for instance, were also predominantly ‘volunteers’. They traditionally undervalued their services in monetary terms when it came to tendering for government grants and, too often, their programs operated at a loss, relying on extensive private fundraising and charity shops for their survival. However, they provided key services in the health system and would be expensive, even impossible, to replace.

Currently, in Australia, non-profits, large and small, are encouraged to become social enterprises – crossing the line between being a community group to becoming organisations that self-fund through their activities to deliver social goods. Indeed, some small environmental groups in Perth have discussed joining together as a social enterprise in order to access government funding for their work (Respondent 12, 2011). If they do make this change, it raises implications for those people who joined the groups to volunteer, to do on ground environmental work, not to become employers and finance managers or service deliverers (Respondent 3).

Designed to engage the community in caring for country and delivering environmental benefits in the form of funding the protection of fragile and degraded landscapes, the NHT ‘experiment’ was underpinned by the government’s commitment and responsibilities to international treaties on the environment (see chapter 4). The requisite State of the Environment reporting (Australian State of the Environment Committee, 2001) designated the community as carers and deliverers of environmental benefits to the country. Achieving positive environmental outcomes through central policy development would require a complex
understanding of the mechanisms necessary to promote a mass philosophical change through policy, legislation and bureaucratic means (see also Lockwood et al, 2014).

The concept of ‘environmentality’ (Agrawal, 2005), of encouraging people to become environmental stewards as opposed to users (abusers), has taxed minds for a long time. The ‘concerted’ (Smith, 2007) sense in the case of the group’s experience (reported here) being that they could care and carry out projects as long as they fitted within the confines of what the funding authority will pay for and members/volunteers are capable of/want to carry out. This is not new and effectively silences sections of the community who may not fit the parameters over time and as policies change. For example, I described in Chapter 2 the experience in New South Wales which started in 1913 with the formation of the Salt Pan Creek Progress Association, (Goodall et al, 2005), where community ownership of place was ultimately displaced over several decades by iterations of bureaucracy and where previously engaged community members were made to feel that they were not “the public” and thus had no say in what happened to their community asset (Goodall et al, 2005, 16).

WHAT ABOUT THE URBAN LANDCARE SPACE?

If lasting outcomes and practice change are difficult to achieve in the rural community who do have a vested interest in improving their own properties, then, the story of urban landcare comes from a quite different thought-space, but not one that is necessarily any more successful or easy to describe. Templates, as has been learned in development practice (Patton, 2011), don’t work as every farmer, volunteer, community, piece of land, climate, soil type are different and complex adaptive systems don’t fit or provide replicable outcomes.

Urban areas have much more disparate communities with little vested interest in the environment other than enjoyment. Urban dwellers are initially more likely to think about joining a community environmental group as a social activity (BVP Survey, 2004) and a way to meet other people while working outside in the fresh air. Over time, this may deepen to increasing their knowledge, desire and capacity to contribute at a higher level (Respondent 1). That said, this impact is generally
restricted to regular participants in catchment and friends’ groups on-ground activities (Dhakal & Paulin, 2009) and is not often more widely disseminated as educative. The group’s projects were mainly focused on remediation with limited external educative engagement with the broader community and were dependent on ongoing availability of knowledgeable volunteers, access to experts and support from other agencies and local governments (most environmental community groups work on public land)(Respondent 2).

I outlined these issues with regard to the group’s experience in Chapter 5. In fact, the Group had been successful in obtaining several funding grants and were in a position at the stage when this research occurred where they did not have the capacity to spend all the money they had received through successful grant funding due to competing projects on hand, changes in personnel, or lack of available expertise. For a few years, too, the group was ‘calcified’ due to lack of commitment by community members to taking on planning and implementation roles (Respondent 4). It is important to note too that many friends’ and community groups have very small memberships, often as few as 4 or 5 people (Dhakal & Paulin, 2009; Spencer, 2016).

INSTITUTIONALISING PARTICIPATION?

Butler et al (2000) raised important distinctions between ‘who participates; and ‘whose knowledge’ was prioritised in any decision making or organisational processes and that engaging with the community (for instance, through the NHT funding and delivery tranches) raised many issues including whether or not the engagement was a feel good measure or a well thought through policy that delivered on its objectives for everyone involved (Butler et al; 2000; Rocheleau, 1994; see also Reed, 2008).

Community participation, capacity building and engagement were the ultimate goal of the environmental programs launched under the banner of NHT1. It was designed to build on the success of the Landcare movement which was grassroots initiated, with the expectation that developing strong community groups would engender the desired environmental education, awareness and behaviour change (Wellman, 2002).
Again, the wicked question arises of remaining a viable community group without being profoundly altered by the experience of delivering government services? Do some community environment groups fall away due to leadership changes or mission drift? Are they prone to the rooting, shooting and leaving process of the mobile middle classes (Wrong, 1976). Or, could they be missing some core commitment of skills or energy which could bring them through the bureaucratic haze and out the other side as stronger and capable independent groups? Or, is the ‘institutionalising’ of participation through government funding just not the right way to do it? I do not have the answers but feel it important to raise the question.

Strong social capital is key to the ongoing success of any network or social grouping, that is, its ability to support internal relationships, as well as develop strong vertical and horizontal relations with other groups (Putnam 2000). The creation and nurturing of relationships between the participants in the group, as well as with other support networks and interested stakeholders is vital to their longer term survival (Paulin & Dhakal, 2011; Sobels et al, 2001; Curtis et al, 2014; see also Cox, 2000; Putnam, 2000, 2001,2002). Butler et al (2000) noted several approaches to participatory natural resource management to engender more effective engagement with the aims of the group, harness their willingness to contribute and the necessary growth of social capital. They found that timing was vital; how and when the community stakeholders were engaged reflected the real intention of the initiators and would thus likely influence the group’s willingness to participate in community activities or stakeholder engagement processes in the future (Butler et al, 2000; see also Lawrence and Deagen, 2001; McCool & Guthrie, 2001; Robinson, 2003).

This is nothing really new - it is the journey between what policy thinkers and writers provide as an action bite and the actual implementation of the policy, the complex and conflicting interests the do-ers have to operate within and how best to interpret (political) meta statements into do-able reality (Thomas, 2005; Davis et al, 1990). There is a liminal space that is unmeasurable, often unseen and unheard, but, that said, still important to trace, recognise and to interpret and understand. It is through uncovering these liminal spaces of what Smith (2007) called “everyday/everynight worlds” (160) that we learn more about how people feel and what they care about and why they do what they do. As Smith (2007) noted, there is
a large gap between what we call ‘institutions’ or ‘organisations’, how they measure what they do, how they do it and the actual day to day experience of the people who work in them or are affected by their practice. This work has explored some of these spaces, on the very edges of what it is to be ‘told’ and how some ‘everyday’ people in the group have reacted in the space that is NRM and its place in ‘community’.

In order to understand better this liminal thing that makes ‘community’ work or not, we need to know what ‘the community’ means? How are ‘they’ engaged? How does the way that ‘texts’ such as policies, funding applications, directives from the catchment council or the government are written put boundaries around the group’s conservation activity? What happens to ‘the community’ when the politicians move onto other things, when the money is needed elsewhere, when the community are silenced or diverted or stretched too far?

In order to have the community deliver service, it is important to know who they are, how they come together and how they can best participate and/or engage, always with the thought in mind:

“(I)s the new participatory myth acting more like a Trojan horse which may end up by substituting a subtle kind of teleguided and masterly organized participation for the old types of intransitive or culturally defined participation, proper to vernacular societies?” (Rahnema, 1997, 167).

Where to look? Much of the participation literature refers to work in third world countries; for example, the participatory rural appraisal (PRA) approach (Chambers, 1997). PRA requires ‘community’ participation in the project design process and emphasizes local knowledge and grassroots initiatives to appraise and develop their own solutions through taking over the ‘outsiders’ role of convenor and facilitator (Kapoor, 2002). The main impetus behind ‘community development’ in the third world comes from global organisations such as the United Nations and international non-government organizations who have been, till now, making good use of templates in their engagement processes (Patton, 2011). There is a very fine line between helping a community to take responsibility for local processes and local
infrastructure and the tendency to colonialism through imposing templates for action (Patton, 2011) as these can render silent or misread the broader implications of designing actions from outside the system that is the peoples’ experience. Patton (2011) suggests that supporting recipient communities to devise their own inquiry as to the efficacy of programs and assisting them to design their own programs based on full local stakeholder input on what the community wants and will support past the leaving date of the NGO/government organisation is vital. Delivery of new knowledge steeped in local systems, practice and culture may mean that these things can be achieved without ongoing outside financial support (Patton, 2011; see also Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993) and they must also be cognisant of local power structures (Kapoor, 2002). This is true of local community actions everywhere, not just the developing world and the best examples of community based environmental groups are those who are self-motivated, work in a space they understand and have a passion for – friends groups, for example.

As Butler et al (2000) also posited it is not just about a universal acceptance of a template that works versus one that doesn’t, it is more importantly about “‘what works for whom?’ and ‘whose interests are being served?’” (Kapoor, 2002, 102).

Kapoor (2002) favoured Habermas’ ‘deliberative democracy’ over Chambers’ PRA approach as it foregrounded the acknowledgement of the ever present, but not always visible, broader issues of power relations. The voluntary change aspect of PRA makes reaching a consensus difficult and relies on those with power being willing to ask for, accept and implement community consensus. This is rarely achieved completely given their need to maintain some form of control. The NHT regional catchment councils generally worked well with and across agencies and their networks. However, their relationships with community groups was often more tenuous and complex and, in some cases, led to loss of trust by the groups.

Power is often not visible; who has it and how do they use it. Kapoor suggested that PRA minimised the role of power, or even ignored it to the detriment of the project (2002). He cited Chambers’ (1997) view that power was “coercive and repressive” (Kapoor, 2002, 112) which contradicted Foucault’s assertion that “power can be positive and that power/ knowledge implicate one another” (Kapoor, 2002, 112). Power and love cannot exist one without the other, it is a constant balancing act and,
as Kahane (2010) noted, power can be a positive purveyor of love and perhaps the most power-full notion is that those with power should put aside their egos so that they may hear others. The concept of voice equates with power: who speaks, who is heard and how does one voice pre-empt and even colonise other quieter, different or less influential voices? If quieter voices are perennially ignored, do they just give up and go away? (Kahane, 2010)

These key questions were also exercised by Flyvbjerg (1998) when thinking about rationality and power and the complex relationship between them. The relationship is often fluid up to the final decision taking moment when power relegates rationality to rationalisation and what best suits the power-full at the time.

The rationality produced is actively formed by the power relations that are themselves grounded and expressed in processes that are social-structural, conjunctural, organisational, and actor related. Conversely, these power relations are supported by the rationality generated (Flyvbjerg, 1998, 27).

And, as he went on to assert, “power defines what counts as knowledge and rationality, and ultimately … what counts as reality” (1998, 27).

So how does the community become part of that reality? From where do they obtain their power? Community participation, engagement, deliberative democracy (Hartz-Karp & Newman, 2006; see also Howlett & Rayner, 2006) invite the community and individuals to be engaged, to be given a voice although the effectiveness of their contributions will depend on the design of the engagement and how much credence is given to their ideas. Engaging communities in decision making processes cannot be separated from the inevitable inequalities and perfunctory randomness of rationality and, thus, power, when it comes to who is privileged to make the final decisions (Flyvbjerg, 1998). The community has traditionally relegated to the few the power to decide and put in place policies and programs “in the best interests’ of all the people they represent. This delegation or taking of responsibility by a higher power – by or from a populace designed and controlled at a distance - can also act over time to deter community’s engagement with the process; create frustration at outcomes that are not representative of the stakeholders – the do-ers and users; and, in some cases, appears to absolve communities of the need to take responsibility for
their own experience and environments by labelling them, as ‘poor’ or ‘not expert’, for example. Frustration developed in the face of top down rules - about safety and insurance, for instance - which regulated what community groups could and could not do, which ultimately dis-incentivised local action; a direct contrast to what NHT was trying to achieve.

Someone from a country town on the radio talked about governments’ ‘nannification’ and standardisation as calcifying community to the extent that their once thriving and caring community of carers, meals on wheels deliverers and volunteers stepped back and wondered if they should just not bother anymore; the opposite effect to the nation of community service deliverers that the politicians wanted to harness to create a more ‘caring society’ (see also Whelan, 2012, Slocock, 2013).

Yes, some organisation and transparency with public funds is vital but uber-bureaucracy stultifies innovation and public spirit. The wicked question that is not answered in this work is in identifying the middle ground where government and community can work together on more equal terms to the benefit of everyone.

**BUT WHO IS THE COMMUNITY?**

Who is the community that are described in the NHT and regional catchment council policy documents and reports (PerthNRM 2015)?

Bruhn (2005) noted there are more than 94 definitions of community and the nebulosity of the concept was equalled only by what was deemed a similarly intangible idea of sustainability. He suggested that “community can usually be described, not defined, and experienced, not generalised” and cited Wrong’s (1976) view that “the achievement of community… cannot come from pursuing it directly, but only as a by-product of the shared pursuit of more tangible goals and activities” (Bruhn, 2005, 16). Reflecting Wrong’s definition of community as an intangible by-product, it was shared concern for the local bushland and waterways that gradually brought people in urban friends’ groups together. They developed social networks (capital) over time within small and locally defined geographical spaces that lead to
caring for each other and the environment as a community (Respondent 1; Dhakal & Paulin, 2009).

It was evident from my research and that of others (Carr, 2002; Beatley, 2005; Government of Western Australia, 2003; Dhakal & Paulin, 2009) that preserving a sense of local place and belonging was a fundamental key to attracting people to join urban environmental groups and to their remaining involved. This ‘place’ might only be a small place near where people lived and socialised, the block of bush next door or the local park along the river. It seems that close connection to the environment becomes more tenuous the further away it is from everyday/everynight life (Respondent 5). For example, when the group was amalgamated and meetings were held even only a few more kilometres away, active ‘community’ membership fell away and the centre of influence changed markedly from community members to paid coordinators, agency and local government representatives (Respondent 3). In a volunteer survey by Perth NRM in 2014, 70% of respondents advised that their interest in NRM began to a very great extent with an attachment to natural areas near their homes.

This sense of place is fleeting and requires nurturing. The electronic age has changed how we relate to others and, some would say, has led to a “moral minimalism” and a growing sense of self-imposed apartness (Pusey, 2003). A pre-requisite for some to become ‘active citizens’ is needing to know ‘what is in it for me’ and availability of spare time to commit to it. How often does our ability to show we care by Facebook ‘likes’ translate in actual action on the ground or committing ourselves to turning up on a regular basis?

In a neo-liberal world, the ongoing success of community groups rests on their ability to communicate their message, to be true to their mission and their members, and, for those that choose to do so, to work with government, business and other agencies (Productivity Commission, 2003). Governments at all levels have long realised that not for profit organisations and volunteers are a more cost effective way of delivering community services than funding government departments and agencies (Funnell, 1998; SCC 2004; English et al, 2009).
However, governing at a distance requires much more attention to what the ‘community’ wants due to the proliferation of electronic information and social media (see Rose, 1999).

Community is a complex and many-splendoured thing that may allow itself to be used as a service deliverer, may engage and enlarge the opportunities for delivery beyond what any government can possibly supply on its own, yet it is also a sensitive thing that will, just as easily, change direction, lose interest or even remove itself from the field, feeling used and abused and taken for granted. The key question again is how delivery of government policy can operate in such an uncertain field. There are no set answers but it is clear from my research that trust, valuing community input and expertise, understanding as far as it is possible what it is to belong to and be a community group and developing robust mechanisms that are not subject to ongoing change play a major role. While the community groups have now been named as the ‘environmental educators’ (PerthNRM 2015), it is clear as one respondent noted it is not just the people that belong to an environmental group who will make the difference, it is all of us who have an effect on the environment and need to change our ways:

If we don’t think about it like that then communities don’t even begin to restore or repair the damage that is done. I don’t know whether that is an unusual vision. It just makes common sense to me, but I don’t think it is common sense and that is probably one of our problems, it is certainly one of our problems in Canberra (Respondent 1).

Bruhn (2005) suggested that now that our basic human needs are better cared for by the various institutional frameworks set up by governments and business (health, welfare etc), people think more deeply about how they relate to others, both culturally and philosophically rather than just ‘living it’. Relating to others as a community has become more problematic in times of relative affluence, individualism, ‘spread-outedness’ and distance from family, especially in an immigrant community like Australia. Bruhn suggested that:

We interact out of necessity; we connect as a consequence of choice. Our connections are what create community. Networks of communities that are
interdependent, diverse and responsive to change, yet cohesive, provide the infrastructure for a healthy society. In today’s world our societal infrastructure is continuously being tested by forces and demands that attempt to alter it, and thereby to change the nature of how we connect within our various communities. We need to analyse these forces and demands and understand the impact they have on our connectedness so that individually and collectively we can create more social capital than we use (2005, ix).

Thus, a sense of community might consist of four aspects:

- a sense of membership – being part of a team;
- influence – “believing that as a member of a team that a person has some degree of power and can make a difference to the outcome”;
- integration and fulfilment of needs – “namely that a person can “round out” the team through their individual skills and abilities”;
- and, finally, a shared emotional connection – “where a person feels good about participating in a joint effort and enjoys the acceptance of other team members” (Bruhn, 2005, 13; see also McMillan and Chavis, 1986).

Yet, not all community is ‘organized’ and perhaps one of the most visible indicators of a vibrant community is not the level of volunteering but rather the level of ‘neighbouring’ that occurs (Prezza et al, 2001). Some ethnic and other local communities do not readily join voluntary organisations, especially environmental groups, but they do live in extended families and care for others in their community. They see this as a duty, a way of life and normal caring for their neighbour rather than an organised activity that you can choose to join or not and, thus, this less visible contribution is not easily quantified by the measurers. This neighbouring does not necessarily translate to caring for the natural environment as their level of trust may be limited by the bounds of their cultural community (Uslaner, 2002).

There is potential in all communities to be more or less ready to pull together in the event of a crisis or incident (for example, activists fighting development on important wetlands, responding to bushfires and floods). But, in our individualized
and isolated society, people hesitate to become involved, wary of even more demands on their busyness or a fear of not having the requisite skills. Pusey said that time condenses into a state of perpetual urgency that thins out experience and interferes with the capacity to learn and remember. It eats away at the moorings of the self and corrodes our relations with others… something very menacing in what economic reform has done to the coherence of ‘civic time’, to the durable time that most of us need as a precondition for even the most elemental sense of security about our own life course (2003, 172).

From my personal experience of being involved in community groups, it is not always the lack of knowing what needs to be done that is the issue, but rather the lack of available time and energy to work with others, to commit to developing a plan and making it happen and, essentially, a willingness to play an active role in getting it done and accepting that it is often only one or two people who often actually will do the work.

So what does this mean for community groups? People living in close proximity to each other. Networks of people with a common interest. An overarching nomenclature for the Australian population - ‘the community’ - by policy makers and politicians who design policy, hovering above the face of our cultural differences and lived reality.

Neoliberalism and the government’s belief in the power of the market to regulate growth and, more recently, community activity, has led to a blurring of the boundaries between governments and not for profit delivery of community and other services (for example: Morison, 2000, Shergold, 2009). Hamilton (2003) and Pusey (2003) suggested it was wrong to rely on the power of economic growth to provide solutions to societal problems. Rather than create happiness, the mantra of growth perpetuates superficial engagement with the market, encourages uncertainty, diminishes institutional and social cohesion and consideration of the deeper issues that are important for vibrant communities and it “has weakened the capacity of mass society to gather people together in mutual recognition of each other as friendly strangers, joined as citizens of a nation society” (Pusey, 2003, 135).
In order to become active environmental citizens, we need to relearn how to trust, how to share and how to take risks in meeting and working with new people and to develop the passion that will carry us through to action. Bruhn (2005) made the point that if people no longer work together for the common good – contributing to a shared experience - then the sense of belonging to a community gradually disappears. Yes, people often discover their desire to help when faced with a disaster yet these are often only “temporary experiences of togetherness purposely planned or created by tragedy” (Bruhn, 2005, 16). ‘Doing’ community can be hard work.

Neo-liberal thinkers and supporters of market driven economies have sidelined externalities such as the environment, diversity, minorities and even ‘the community’ on a sliding scale depending on their importance to their agenda or more importantly their most vocal constituency at any particular time (Hamilton, 2003, Thomas, 2005). The growing consumerism experienced by western societies since the rebuilding stage after World War II encouraged urban western populations to believe that happiness can be bought, offset by diminishing connection to traditional concepts of ‘community’, country’ and the environment (Hamilton, 2003). Technology is cheap and quickly obsolete and doing or being part of a ‘community’ has been replaced for many by entertainment and intellectual stimulation through the electronically isolating mediums of the mobile phone, the television and the internet (Hamilton, 2003, Whittington, 2002; Putnam, 2002). The economic mantra of growth and ‘more is better’ has also led to imbalance in the time spent working versus time left for life. The rhetoric of work/life balance entered our vocabulary as “the promises of economic reform have now gone sour. We are becoming aware that, delivered in this form, economic development fights with quality of life” (Pusey, 2003,170-171).

Economic rationalism and the market economy have created a more mobile workforce, between jobs and between locations. Transience can exacerbate feelings of isolation and a diminishing commitment to find time or make the effort to become involved in community activities. From personal experience as a ‘joiner and leader’, starting again in a new community is difficult (I have done it multiple times) and some people never achieve this successfully. Some country communities and groups
actively decide not to accept new people and ideas, at least until they have lived there long enough to be considered – finally - as belonging, after many years (Paulin, 2006). Wrong (1976) talks about the mobile middle classes, who root, engage and leave more often than less educated, more static strata of society. These ‘joiners and leaders’ play a vital role in community activity (Curtis et al, 2001) yet their easy mobility and joining activity can be problematic to the communities they leave behind who may be less generalised trusters (Uslaner, 2002) and perhaps less skilled at building networks and developing organisational functions. Not to mention the cliques and the purple circles and the way we have always done it! Critiques of Cameron’s Big Society policy suggested that middle class England had the skills to fend for themselves and to set up the community linkages that were left foundering by ‘saving money’ policies. It was the less educated, less mobile England that would find it more difficult to create and support such activities (Slocock, 2013, Whelan, 2012).

In the absence of traditional community-held measures of trustworthiness and honesty through regular face to face communication and increased distance from service providers, society has had to find alternative institutions in which to trust, for example, the law, business and governments. This has important implications for ‘community’ as service deliverers (Pusey, 2003; Slocock, 2013).

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**TRUST**

Trust is the key motivator in our decisions whether or not to join a group or community activity and cultural background and upbringing influences our predilection towards our willingness to trust (Uslaner, 2002). ‘Generalised trusters’ take people at face value and become involved with groups and organisations, as their parents probably did before them, whereas ‘non-trusters’ tend to belong to small, tightly bounded communities which do not easily admit strangers and whose members rarely mix with other less structured and unrelated groups.

Trust in government and civic society organisations is also moderated by our willingness to accept uncertainty, to devolve power to the few and our expectation that others will take most decisions in the community’s best interests (Putnam, 2000;
Uslaner, 2002). People who join local environment groups often do so in the hope that they will meet like-minded people, trusting that other people will teach them what to do. They are often quite unaware of the intricate levels of trust and power constantly forming and reforming in the broader environmental network which influences what their particular group can do (Respondent 1).

Khodyakov (2007) defined trust as a process rather than a set variable or characteristic. He argued that this iterative process took into account the past, present and future – by understanding the past, knowing the actors in the present situation and anticipating the future. This basis of trust also engendered the willingness to accept unknown but positively anticipated outcomes.

Khodyakov further suggested that the decision to trust can never be totally rational given the operation of intuition, imagination and ambition based on past experience (2007). His differentiation between ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ levels of interpersonal trust fits with Uslaner’s (2002) descriptions of ‘generalised trusters’ and ‘non-trusters’. Khodyakov also differentiated between interpersonal and institutional trust and pointed out that while the Russian people in his study were deeply distrustful of their governmental institutions, even after the move to democracy, “strong networks of interpersonal trust facilitated social exchange among different groups, which helped people survive during the long years of a poorly managed economy” (2007, 128).

In his study, Pusey (2003) found that trust was linked to “perceptions of social structure” (135) and that ‘middle Australia’ who felt that they had benefitted from and believed in the government’s pronouncements about the value of economic reform and who also exhibited higher levels of generalised trust had a distorted view about the experiences of people less well off than themselves - echoing the neoliberal free market mantra that anyone can ‘make it’ and those that do often distance themselves from where they have come from. This was evident too in the findings of The Big Society Audit 2013 (Slocock, 2013). Bruhn also suggested that the values inherent in the way people expressed loyalty and trust in the past seemed to be missing now and thus, perhaps, our relationships were more tenuous and instead defined by lack of trust and hesitation to commit to things outside our limited sphere of knowing (2005).
Wilkinson and Bittman (2002) linked trust with reciprocity which was also “tied to the politically self-conscious experience of people who see themselves as citizens” (6). This reciprocal tendency to trust engenders the formation of social capital and the ability of members of a group to more easily support each other through the formation of communities of interest, which sustain and progress their collective aims. However, while “the public benefits of social capital are now widely recognised as having the potential to sustain and renovate economic and political institutions … the democratic potential of social capital is frequently subverted by the instrumental purpose to which it is put” (Wilkinson and Bittman, 2002, 6). For example, the Productivity Commission (2003) examined the concept of social capital and its implications for government including the negative ramifications of badly designed public policy which could stifle existing social capital and also queried how governments could “recalibrate their policies to better utilise existing ‘stocks’ of social capital” (2003, ix) in delivering services by and to the people.

Wilkinson and Bittman (2002) also found that the Australian government had manipulated the ethos of social democracy, that is, a universal right to choose to participate, into a “principle of mutual obligation” (6). Welfare recipients and those on community service orders are more and more obligated to carry out some form of ‘volunteer’ work to justify their allowance or to make recompense to society. As a consequence, volunteers and community groups have been morphed into - concerted into being - providers of opportunities and support for those at risk and, in the case of this thesis, the natural environment (see also Slocock, 2013). For example, projects like the building of the Bibbulman Track (a 900km walking track from Perth to Albany), tree planting and bush regeneration activities in several parts of Western Australia have been successfully undertaken by prisoners or offenders on community service work orders. The Greencorps was set up by the Howard Government to provide short term training opportunities for unemployed youth by carrying out environmental regeneration and community projects in return for youth allowance and this opportunity was extended to all job seekers wishing to meet their “Intensive Activity Requirement” (Jobsearch, 2013). The Abbott Government (2014) extended this policy to ‘invite’ non-profit organisations to take on these ‘volunteers’ in a much wider range of ‘helping’ activities (Environment Australia, 2014) including planting their 20 Million Trees (see also Curtis & Race, 1997).
Thus, the way that people relate to their community and how the government utilises ‘community’ groups as service deliverers has implications for the role and definition of ‘community’ and, in consequence, what it means to be a volunteer (Oppenheimer, 2008). Traditionally, a volunteer is someone who contributes to society through a desire to be a good citizen with no recompense apart from feelings of fulfilment, connectedness and a sense of having contributed to a wider extension of community trust (Petriwskyj & Warburton, 2007; Warburton & Oppenheimer, 2000). Like ‘community’, there are many variations in what is considered volunteering and the difference, if any, between being a volunteer and a group member. Most environment group members would probably consider they are also volunteers as they give their time freely and without recompense (Petriwksyj & Warburton, 2007).

Community groups are more often set up from a haphazard set of circumstances, with like-minded people and a mutual desire to follow a particular interest. The appropriation or manipulation by government of this form of developing social capital has implications for the ongoing health of voluntary organisations like the group in this case study (Willkinson & Bittman 2002). The mutually beneficial horizontal bonding relationships which traditionally supported community efforts and gave a sense of having a voice, have been replaced over the period of this research with an unequal vertical relationship whereby the government retains and exercises power through texts in the form of policy and funding decisions and the creation of new bureaucracies. This was well illustrated by Eversole (2011) who carried out a broad ethnographic study of rural communities in Australia and found that “Governments increasingly want to work with communities, but are much less interested in how communities actually work” (66) and whose findings echo the experience of the group in this research.

While the ad hoc funding allocation under NHT1 was problematic and the regionalisation process set up under NHT2 provided a more measurable and transparent funding delivery system, the language changed from promoting community capacity building to preferencing on-ground work in response to frustrated farmers who wanted to see more doing/less talking, fewer paper chases and reports about solutions by ‘experts’ that didn’t work on the ground (Whittington, 2005). This then flowed into changing the language that could be used in funding
applications from capacity building to on-ground work and distancing the community...silencing them... from what then became a more formalised bureaucratic tendering process, almost a job creation scheme (Wallman, 2002, Whittington, 2005). These changes distanced the community, but, carefully, not so far as removing the necessity of community groups to be the initiators on paper of the bureaucratised projects and the translucent holder of the government’s funds.

As noted above, Norton (1998) agreed that the level of public policy intervention in Australia in many areas of social life led to a decrease in social capital through the removal of the need for the community to assume responsibility and show initiative with regard to these issues both as individuals and as a group. As Pusey described it “in Australia, people do not think much about ‘society’ and for that reason may have more difficulty than people in other nations ... in deciding where, in what circumstances, and in relation to what domains of life, individual responsibility takes precedence over collective action” (2003, 112).

This has flow on effects to the level of preparedness to engage in community activities and has consequently diminished the vital development of trust in others necessary for sustained community activity to occur (Cote, 2001; Norton, 1998; Slocock, 2013). As noted before, confusions and contradictions in government policy and their public statements contribute to this (Slocock, 2013; Mulgan, 2012).

Cote (2001) found that this decrease in social capital is not as apparent in European countries with similar levels of regulation. Why is this? Is it because non-indigenous and multicultural Australia is a relatively new society lacking in long established traditions and cross cultural community memories? Cultural communities uphold their own traditions and while welcoming other cultures to enjoy their various public celebrations, there may be little cross fertilisation across the various groupings at the deeper social level. That is, the level of trust in others, which is an important indicator for increased community activity, is limited to their own particular cultural groups, at least for first generation migrants (Uslaner, 2002). For new migrants coming to a foreign country, getting used to how systems work for school and work is more important than environmental issues. Thus, public environmental and other
education campaigns designed to reach a broad cross section of demographics, (age, social standing) have the added requirement in Australia of attempting to reach and form bridges between a wide variety of cultures (Randle & Dolnicar, 2009). This all contributes to the conundrum in practice of identifying and engaging ‘who’ can do the work of looking after the environment?

It is evident that effective community building is a complex task, particularly in urban Australia. School related volunteering and junior sporting activities probably attract the bulk of voluntary hours served although even these groups find sustained community input difficult to maintain without consistent effort by ‘the few’ – the ‘do-ers’ (Oppenhiemer, 2008). Making the effort requires commitment and belief in the cause, an ingrained sense of duty and values and a willingness to take a chance and trust others.

Developing people’s interest in caring for the environment, what Petriwskyj and Warburton (2007), Carr (2002) and others call ‘environmental stewardship’, to the extent that individuals play an active role in building awareness of it in their local community will require extensive awareness-creation on a broad scale, as well as recognition by everyone, including government, that this is important. This is not achievable just by ‘rewarding’ environment groups with money but also through attention to governments’ higher level public actions and pronouncements which can support this process better instead of appearing contradictory (Curtis & Lockwood, 2000; Measham & Barnett, 2008; Paulin, 2007). Engendering philosophical change is much more difficult than just funding a tree planting program or a green army.

Targeted programs which provide opportunities for easy, low key participation are important pathways for greater participation as interest, skills and the decision to devote additional personal time to such projects grows (Respondent 2). The results of the 2004 survey of members of the Group confirmed this with many expressing interest in the planned projects and activities but few actually physically taking part in them, illustrating the disconnect between level of interest and commitment to doing.

In my data, there was also commentary about the efficacy of untrained volunteers carrying out environmental surveys and regeneration work (Respondents 2 and 4;
Lunney et al, 2002; Edwards and Langford, 2002). For example: as noted in Chapter 5, in the early days, the group developed a weekly water quality monitoring project but then later realised, once attendance tailed off and the equipment had been lost, that local government and the Water Corporation had the tools and experts to do this very easily and that they could just have asked these bodies to check it for them (Respondent 3). What they had designed was a project which briefly engaged volunteers/members and also provided an opportunity to work alongside others on a regular basis without fully understanding the bigger picture of how this information could be better gathered and used. Without a clear and timely outcome, interest faded away over time. While this was educative with regard to planning future projects, it was also a frustration for those involved (Respondent 3).

The oft quoted desire to ‘build community capacity’ in early NRM policy texts is so much more than just training and in the NRM arena encompasses change management, organisational theory, multi-level and inter-group liaison, clear and equitable coordination and excellent communications. It also requires a level of trust by government that the community is capable of coming up with solutions to often complex problems:

‘Genuine collaboration … requires public servants who, with eyes wide open, can exert the qualities of leadership necessary to forsake the simplicity of control for the complexity of influence’ (Shergold 2008: 21 cited in Butcher and Gilchrist, 2016)

Robins (2009) talked about the difficulties faced by the higher level catchment councils where volunteer board members felt they were not well enough prepared to carry out the activities required of them by the NRM hierarchy. This was experienced even more keenly by those who experienced the downline activities of the catchment councils and the abrupt policy changes that the various tranches of NHT and state government policy brought about (Respondent 1) including loss of paid positions, multiple reorganisations of specialists, the removal of many support mechanisms for community based catchment and other environmental groups and the removal of community capacity building from the lexicon of approved phrases.
SO, WHAT DOES WORKING TOGETHER MEAN FOR GOVERNMENTS, AGENCIES AND COMMUNITY GROUPS?

Government and governance revolve around policy development and implementation in an ever shifting landscape of community expectations and economic imperatives and this section examines just some of the issues which have arisen in my research in the context of the relationships between community groups, agencies and all levels of government.

An interesting nexus has developed in Australia between central governments and bureaucracies designing and implementing policy in the traditional top down manner and other, more inclusive, deliberative processes which involved consultation and engagement with the relevant community and occurs more often at the local government level (Hartz-Karp & Newman, 2006) (see also the ‘new governance’ model: Howlett and Rayner (2006) and Lockwood et al (2010). Western Australia was the first state in Australia to have a Sustainability Strategy which was translated to requirements for state government departments and agencies to engage with community and other stakeholders with regard to design of major projects (Hartz-Karp & Newman, 2006; Ross & Dovers, 2006). The bureaucracy took this on with varying degrees of acceptance (Robins, 2009). However, over time, some diminution in the mantra of engagement has occurred as government found this an inhibiting factor to their policy formation practice.

Environmental community groups, who decided to become stakeholders in governments’ engagement and decision-making processes, were quickly made aware that their group structure needed to be more formalised, more business-like, in order to be taken seriously and to ensure transparency in reporting activities and funding acquittals. Representation became an issue, not just who represented the group but whether those groups that participated in deliberative and network processes were truly representative of the wider community (Flyvbjerg, 1998). In fact some members of the group actively used their membership to access the wider environmental network and to push for a seat at the table in higher level discussions (Respondent 6). McLeod and McCulloch (2002) noted the variation in understanding between the government and environment groups in Scotland.
Government encouraged the environment groups in their study to come together to form an umbrella organisation called LINK which would speak to government on behalf of the member groups. The environment groups thought that this meant their views and contributions were valued and would be taken into account; whereas the researchers found that government viewed this new grouping as a way of better managing the environmental movement (McLeod and McCulloch, 2002).

John Stuart Mill wrote his essay, Considerations on Representative Government, in 1861 and recommended a system of representative governance combining election of suitably qualified representatives by a knowledgeable citizenry; these elected members exercising controls in the public interest; combined with a well-educated, independent and trained bureaucracy which developed policy and legislation for approval by the elected members and ensured its implementation (Warner, 2001). The system had inbuilt checks and balances which, in a perfect world, would ensure that no one branch assumed ultimate control. Mill was firmly of the view that public participation in governance was vital as he felt that this created opportunities to educate citizens about their opportunities to influence governance and, in turn, elect competent representatives who were answerable to their electorates (Warner, 2001). As Warner suggested, the underlying quality of the three sectors of governance proposed by Mill – the ‘elite citizen’, the ‘wise representative’ and the ‘skilled bureaucrat’ was competence.

Mill saw the bureaucracy as a group “specially trained for governing” (Warner, 2001, p408). He felt that it was the job of the bureaucracy to develop the policies and legislation necessary to implement the ideas of the representative body, in concert with ensuring that new policies correlated with or took account of existing legislative requirements. While the bureaucrats were best qualified to deal with the minutiae of administration, they did “not encourage individuality and creativity. Bureaucratic governments need the spirit of individuality and originality that is found in representative government” (Warner, 2001, 408). Warner summed up Mill’s theory in saying “the antagonistic interests of representative government and bureaucracy provide security for good government” (409).
This thesis has detailed what happened to the group in this context and how ‘the antagonistic interests’ - the various texts - were still in play in designing community-delivered government policy.

This leads to the related notion of ‘governmentality’ and professionalisation, that is, the way that relationships between governments and non-government stakeholders operate to normalise compliance (standardisation) and concert the activities of those it funds.

PROFESSIONALISATION AND ISOMORPHS – THE RISKY BUSINESS OF COMMUNITY

This section looks at the professionalising of community as stakeholders and service deliverers that has occurred in Australia (in community based NRM and other non-government sectors) and in the UK, under the guise of compacts with the voluntary sector (Morison, 2000) and, later, ‘the Big Society’ – a concept which first arose in the UK but was also briefly discussed in Australia (Slocock, 2013, Whelan, 2012).

In 1998, compacts were drawn up between the four governments of the United Kingdom and the main representatives of the voluntary sector concerned with policy and community service delivery (Morison, 2000). These had some similarities to the agreements between the federal and state governments and the regional NRM bodies in Australia in terms of the types of language employed when talking about what the community could do, which Morison described as “vague” and even “almost trite” (2000, 119). While, superficially, these compacts encouraged a new relationship between the state and the non-profit and voluntary sector … “at another level it seems that a new political rationality is being developed by the state and articulated through governmental technologies of control and measurement” (Morison, 2000, 119).

He described the compact process as a form of degovernmentalism:

where new ‘technologies’ and ‘rationalities’ of power are being developed to stimulate agency while simultaneously reconfiguring (rather than removing) constraints upon the freedom of choice of the agent. This is ‘governing
through freedom’. Through the compacts process, the sector is being encouraged to exercise a ‘responsibilised autonomy’ and pursue its interests through the framework where the ‘systems of thought’ and ‘systems of action’ emphasise and reinforce an economic rationality alongside the more traditional welfare ethos. Of course it is not a one way process where the state by itself creates whole epistemologies and idioms of political power. The sector is an ‘active subject’ which not only collaborates in this exercise of government but also shapes and influences it (Morison, 2000, 119).

Even though this power may be disseminated through various networks and bodies, which, on the face of it, are not intimately connected with government, they do operate to constrain and regulate society on behalf of government. For instance, insurance companies and banks - “social means for the ‘taming of chance’” (Morison, 2000, 122) - play a covert role in regularising the financial and life decisions of the general populous and community service groups, what they can and cannot do. In turn, “individuals relate to power not as simple coerced objects, but as autonomous subjects whose objectivity is shaped by their active engagement with the powers that govern them and by which they ‘govern themselves’” (Morison, 2000, 123; see also Smith, 2007).

In a similar vein, Sinclair (1998) suggested that once volunteer conservationists were persuaded into becoming part of government sponsored consultation, they were effectively silenced and they were less likely to speak out about the failings of the system; the texts precluded their ability to be non-citizens (see also Smith, 2007; Edgar, 2008).

The standpoint of stakeholders involved in such negotiations is thus more complex than just taking part and has implications for how representative they can be; at what stage might they find themselves, as individuals rather than group members, straying into taking an active role in the process and moving away from the deeply held but possibly oppositional views of the group they represent … the complexity of power and voice again and who has it (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Kahane, 2010). Thus, community representation as stakeholders is never straight forward and governments have to factor in risk when dealing with non-profits and community groups invited to contribute to decision making. The non-profits, through receiving reciprocal funding
and entering into other such agreements, are, over time, concerted by the process to behave in a particular manner which also exposes them to an element of risk through their chosen representatives exercising a prerogative to flexibility (Martin, 1984; Edgar, 2008; Robins, 2009; Robins & Dovers, 2006).

I wonder whether the community - the groups - actually think so deeply about the implications of being part of such an intricate web of relationships and responsibilities? The survey of group members carried out at the beginning of this research certainly did not reflect this. A participant in a policy development training program I ran for catchment groups in 2013 threw up their hands at the end of the session and said “but why do we have to do all this policy stuff – it is not why we set the group up in the first place?” My response - “I understand how you feel … but if you take money from government, you have to be transparent about how you use it and you have to be sure you have developed policies about who can use chain saws, so that if the need arises, you have some little defence to prove duty of care”. Some left a little depressed about the work they would have to do to put these policies in place - to become more bureaucratised - and to ‘protect’ themselves. Their immediate desire was to be an active group on the ground, not to be drawn into the intricacies and requirements of the broader environmental enterprise.

The professionalisation of stakeholder groups is important to government as it makes tracking funding and activities much easier through inculcating forms of surveillance in reporting and negotiations (Morison, 2000). While this sounds like and probably is ‘big brother’, they cite important reasons for transparency:

> We want to do business with them and, yes, it is easier for us if they are professionalized and know what they are doing and conform to certain procedures et cetera. But it’s in their interests too. Funding … everything is made more simple … We don’t want to tame them as such but this is the way it is going … a more professionalized sector is inevitable … it fits the moment (Respondent in Morison, 2000, 129).

This sentiment pervaded my own research as the group became increasingly professionalized. The preferred government and catchment council NRM programs rapidly became more easily controlled through the conforming activities of the
various community groups that benefitted from government funding and professional assistance with coordination. This control continued in the shadows when funding support was withdrawn as the affected groups were then distanced from important networks and their ability to be heard (and, in some case, survive) was much diminished. At the same time, their name and existence was vital to the success of funding applications submitted by the sub regional groups and local governments to funnel funds and to pay some lip service to the continued requirement to work with a community group (Respondent 5).

Morison (2000) did not imply that these developments were counter to the interests of the voluntary sector groups which participated in the compact. In fact, they actively participated in the reforming – the reconcerting - of their world, perhaps seeing it as progress, the way forward, or just the best way to facilitate access to needed funds and influence.

However, the allocation of power in these relationships, evidenced by the impact of funding and organisational changes on the group is, evidently, very much one-sided with most of the power residing with the body that holds the money – with the community taking on and complying with the government’s texts (Smith, 2007). The loss of a small environmental group might register as only a blip on the radar of an environmental enterprise that can design its own projects, without community input, apart from, perhaps, a name and some willing hands. When the group became political and publicly protested the loss of funding for a sub-regional coordinator with local members of parliament and government agencies, they were quickly advised by the regional catchment council representatives that community groups were not being supported under the new regime (NHT2), with little apology for any lack of clear communication of this policy to the groups themselves (Respondent 4).

This example illustrates the active flowdown effect of the professionalising, ‘isomorphing’ process: the government expected the regional catchment council to conform and concerted this behaviour through reporting, investment and management plans (Robins, 2009); the regional catchment council expected the sub regional groups to conform, in return for awarding funding through tenders and continued employment contracts; and, then, the catchment groups and friends
groups were the last in line, left to decide between belonging or losing relevance and the reduced support available to them.

The blurring of the boundaries between governments, agencies and civic society has opened up new spaces where power is negotiated and exercised at a layer independent of the traditional boundaries of government, but which allows the tentacles of neoliberalism to filter into the activities of community organisations (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001; Morison 2000; see also Humphreys, 2009 for a perspective on how this occurs on the international stage). A degree of managerialism is necessary for the effective operation of such groups, especially if they receive public funding, but taken further, this corporatisation or professionalizing process often works to the detriment of volunteer groups that operate out of passion rather than service provision. Perhaps, too, there is an issue attention cycle for volunteers – where one group fades away and then, later, another develops to take on similar issues. Tuckman (1965) wrote about ‘forming, norming, storming and adjourning’ (or mourning) framework of groups over time. While the studies by Tuckman were of groups of students or participants in team exercises and not a group of disparate individuals coming together to form a community group, there are many similarities evidenced by the experience of the group in this research.

One of Morison’s agency respondents noted:

“Voluntarism will always re-emerge. There’s always going to be people who just do what they want: they see an issue and just get stuck in. That’s what the voluntary sector is in the end – people just doing things, and you can’t really hope to control that” (Note 116 in Morison, 2000, 131).

Raco (2002) studied the impact of various organisational practices on relationships between local governance and non-elected organisations involved in urban regeneration. He found that the way that stakeholder groups worked together was critical to the ultimate success of any policy. This is particularly true when applied to the implementation of Australian Commonwealth NRM policies by the state and local governments, regional bodies, community groups and individuals and their relationships with each other. As has been previously stated, this was a complex
network and communication lines, when blocked, resulted in one or more players being estranged from the process and in other cases, players not being able to deliver what was required of them, leaving a legacy of failure and disillusion (Respondent 1, 2004; Robins, 2009; Robins & Dovers, 2006). This complexity lead to the formation of yet more bureaucratic structures designed to ensure everyone could be involved in the process, though not always with an equal voice, and these networks were fluid and subject to change on a regular basis, who was in, who was out and what words – texts - could be used…or not (Smith, 2007) with ongoing iterations: NHT1, NHT2, NHT3 and Caring for Country and the rest.

Raco (2002) maintained that ‘the social relations of organisational activity’ (437) are often neglected and emphasised their importance in identifying effective organisations. He commended organisational theory as a tool to further navigate and make visible “the processes of institutionalisation within local governance, spatial variations in policy delivery and the opportunities and threats posed to local communities by emerging local policymaking processes” (Raco, 438).

Bureaucracies and, indeed, community groups are not all created equal and are subject to the whims of their own internal group of actors, each of whom may exercise influence on how day to day decisions are taken and policies implemented (Beck, 1998; Branaman, 2003; see also Humphreys, 2009). Goffman’s work on interaction theory, described by Branaman (2003), illustrates that individuals usually present their best face in situations where they either exert or are subjected to authority. This ‘face’ is more often than not related to how they experience the interaction personally and how they can best exert influence and is not always directly related to what happens in the organisational field they represent. Organisational change more often than not occurs from within, in response to the day to day modifications and adjustments imposed through negotiating with peers, making policy decisions and institutional programs workable with external clients (Raco, 2002, Branaman, 2003).

Raco (2002) explained that whereas the 1980s and 1990s in the United Kingdom were marked by “an ideological dualism between a bureaucratic, rationalistic public sector and a dynamic entrepreneurial set of post-bureaucratic new institutions … the new local governance has been characterised by the emergence of quango
institutions, established by central state, to oversee a number of areas of local state policy” (440).

Raco (2002) was interested in how these organisations worked and how outcomes and program delivery were affected by the relationships and organisational dynamics between the organisation and the various local stakeholders, particularly given the shift in responsibility for policy creation from the institutions to new partnerships with public, private and voluntary stakeholders. He described the activities of two Urban Development Corporations (UDCs) set up in an attempt to introduce private sector ways of working to the public sector (Imrie & Raco, 1999; Raco, 2002). In practice, “the willpower, charisma and dynamism of private individuals were placed in juxtaposition to the bureaucratic, formulaic, inflexible characterisation of local government officials and planners” (Raco, 2002, 240). This juxtaposition, therefore, required movement from both sides to work effectively, with the added complexity of working with an active local community whose ongoing support was vital to ensuring urban re-developments went ahead without local protest. The UDCs were influenced by both the local context and the leadership style of the chairperson (Raco, 2002). The entrepreneurial outlook which resulted was reflected in the critique of these new institutions highlighting their tendency to work at a distance from the local community, “a tendency to implement policies in places, rather than for places; weak lines of accountability constructed through markets, rather than formal political procedures; and the aggressive implementation of policy” (Raco, 2002, 440; see also Robins, 2009). Sound familiar?

On the other hand, the lower level officers in the UDC, many of whom came from local government and had previous experience of working with local community stakeholders, actively presented alternative public views to those held by the executive and thus shaped the programs through their day to day negotiation with local stakeholders. While the executive verged towards the entrepreneurial, the lower level officers were more conscious of the need to work with and accommodate the community (Raco, 2002), the deliverers of the detail!

The SCC remodelled itself in response to government funding requirements for NHT2. At the same time, the sub regional catchment body (SERCUL) worked hard to maintain connection with and continue support for local community catchment
groups, including the group. This was made more difficult when funding was withdrawn for groups to directly employ catchment group coordinators and project officers. The ongoing restructuring of the funding commitments on a number of occasions during my research, meant that some of these professional staff were subsequently employed under ‘specialist’ programs by the sub-regional group, with the catchment groups left with no ‘official’ coordinators and planners of projects. The sub-regional group also sought to access alternative funding to ensure their survival and carefully picked its few financial ties with the SCC. SERCUL now present themselves as a ‘business’, yet all planning and projects remain short term – until the money runs out (Respondent 1, 2014). They have developed a corps of trained volunteers who they call on to assist with their programs as needed. The group is once again run by a small number of volunteer members, acknowledging local government and agency projects by lending their name for funding and providing an opportunity for stakeholders to share information – local government and agency to agency, with only small one off opportunities for on-ground work possible (Respondent 12, 2011). Anecdotal evidence reveals that many catchment and Landcare and LCDC groups now operate in name only, both in the city and in rural areas in Western Australia (Eva, 2007; Whittington, 2007; Drew, 2007). Farmers – and community members - are busy people and need to know that they are contributing time and effort to a cause which does something practical on a regular basis.

The short term funding cycle also favours designing easy projects that can be carried out with minimal costs, rather than looking at how larger, longer term solutions can make a real difference (Drew, 2007). Of necessity, local government environment plans are based on addressing priorities with limited resources, with extra funding, time and expertise needed to work with or instigate local community groups. Like the other tiers, it is influenced by the particular interests of elected councillors and if there is little interest in environmental issues, then budget allocations and subsequent levels of activity are likely to be allocated to what they deem to be more pressing concerns (Respondent 3). In recent years, WA state government funding for local government environmental and climate related community programs has been radically reduced, rendering competition for LotteryWest grants very fierce. Dale (2001) also pointed out that the need for speed, the necessity to be seen to be making
decisions even when not fully aware of all the circumstances or without an in depth understanding of the situation, militated against organisations taking time for reflection, expanding their knowledge and designing programs which would deliver what was best needed in terms of protecting the environment long term.

As Dovers and Wyborn concluded:

The idea that we can harmoniously and profitably achieve production, recreation and conservation in the one place might be commonplace rather than contested. If that is to happen, though, it will be the product of sustained and remarkable efforts that overcome borders and boundaries on the landscape, in the mind and in the agencies that have made many previous efforts and struggle and only partially successful at best. So far it has been ecological scientists and NGOs, and the small parts of government where biodiversity conservation is taken seriously, that have investigated the need and advocated the answers. It is impossible not to conclude that the biggest challenges will be in attending the legal, cultural and political boundaries and barriers, and that invites the contribution of many other players and many other ways of understanding people and place (2009, 973).

WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN?

In summary, the premise of engaging the community to care for the environment was a massive project and one which has run through several iterations of how to best achieve this, without many scalable indicators of any visible change. What was promoted as a ‘great environmental project’ (Curtis et al, 2014) when it was first announced by the politicians and the policy writers turned out to be a highly complex undertaking that spent millions of dollars on projects across the nation, the value of many of which has not been adequately measured. What started as a political response to serious environmental issues and a desire to be seen to be doing something, planting thousands of trees, curing salinity, controlling access to water and so on, using the motif of community delivery has not worked on the broad scale required to even make a small dent in the environmental issues which continue to face us or large scale behaviour change.
On the other hand, it has frustrated many in the community, including community members of the group, to the extent that they left and moved on to other things (Respondent 3). As MacLeary (2009) noted in her examination of a government initiated New Deal for Communities project in Bristol, UK, projects like this sought “to install a particular mentality of rule in local subjects that denies the complexities and contested interpretations of concepts such as community and affects the programme’s ability to respond to broader social problems”(864). Government funding through the NHT bounded what could be achieved with the money; it didn’t initially allow for payment of administrative costs for community groups, and could only be spent within very narrow limitations - the layers of bureaucracy visited upon the community groups – seen by government as the deliverers – suffocated many of them to the point of frustration and ultimate stagnation and diminishment of the overall project.

Yes, education, weeding the bush and planting trees are important but so are addressing the way we think at a deeper level, our understanding of how our everyday lives impact on the environment around us and what we can personally do to reduce that impact and help others to change too. Ideally these two levels of knowing would operate alongside each other, intermixed, but these are complex issues that as a community - politicians, policy makers and individuals - need to reflect on carefully to really understand and grow into later taking action. Artificial bureaucratic bounding and misunderstanding of community’s role in such a complex enterprise may serve to diminish its possibilities.

The success or failure of collaboration lies not in the emerging network structures of governance or even in the evolving systems by which influences are wielded. It requires new forms of leadership behaviour, particularly on the part of the public servants who remain central to most discussions of public policy and administration. Instead of imposing agendas it needs to negotiate them. It demands public servants who can stand in the shoes of those with whom they deal, can understand their particular perspectives and interests and, by doing so, build trust. And it can be enhanced by a clear indication that public servants will champion the collective decisions of the
group – using their disproportionate power on behalf of the collaborative
venture (Shergold, 2008, 17).

Perhaps the ‘jewels in the crown’ are those groups, like SERCUL, who have through
working through the morass, come to an understanding of what is possible and how
best to achieve it – organising a business of environmental specialists, tendering for
funding and training a small workforce of volunteers who can be called into action
when needed, with little or no need for their input to master plans and program
design.

We also need to better understand more about why people do things and what spurs
them to act to create positive change in their lives and communities. Levels of trust
and social capital have already been spoken of in this chapter. The World Bank
(2015) examined the behaviour change process in the context of future development,
and pointed out that this understanding is vital for any undertaking designed to
prompt us as individuals and as a community to change our behaviour. They
suggested that “paying attention to how humans think (the processes of the mind)
and how history and context shape thinking (the influence of society) can improve
the design and implementation of development policies and interventions that target
human choice and action (behaviour)” (World Bank, 2015, 2). They suggested three
overarching principles: “thinking automatically” – most people make everyday
decisions without a lot of extra thought; “thinking socially” – what other people in
our social group think and how they act will influence our own decisions in any
given situation; and, “thinking with mental models” speaking to the idea that any
given social grouping has a “common perspective on making sense of the world
around them and understanding themselves” (World Bank, 2015, 3). The trick is to
understand specific issues from these three perspectives and to not get caught up in
creating unneeded complexity which renders solutions too difficult to maintain in
everyday life. For instance, embedding messages about saving money and the perils
of gambling in a popular soap opera in South Africa enabled viewers to ‘think
socially’ and resulted in less gambling and risky finance deals (Berg & Zia, 2013;
World Bank, 2015). Australian television reality and gardening programs now
promote messages about using water wise plantings, waste reduction, recycling,
energy saving and so on which have positively influenced consumer behaviour. Is
this a better way of encouraging behaviour change than the re-creation of a yet another bureaucracy?

This chapter has examined the broader meta issues which arose in the data collected through the IE process with the Group (see Chapter 5) through consideration of the connections between neoliberal public policy, community as active citizens and service providers and the co-option or bureaucratizing of community. The commentary also examined factors such as trust and social capital that are integral to the success (or not) of involving community in the NHT and similar experiments. These are also viewed through the frame of how the big picture ‘texts’, policies and ideas concerted social relations by those who experienced them (Smith, 2007).

Chapter 7, in concluding this work, will summarise the ideas and briefly ‘update’ the reader as to more recent activity in the local NRM community space since the period under study of 2003 to 2008. This new data shows that really not a lot has changed with regard to how the urban community experience NRM.
It will be evident to readers that this thesis has been a long time in writing and that several years have passed since data was collected by survey and interviews. Some of the issues that I identified have already since been taken up by others, particularly with regard to the changing NHT/NRM frameworks and the value of working with and supporting community groups in NRM (see for instance Agrawal, 2005; Brown & Bishop, 2011; Curtis et al, 2014; Perth NRM, 2015).

As would be expected, since the period of this study (2003-2008), the tendency to reformulate, reinvent and change tack has continued with each change of government, numerous reviews of NRM and the environmental funding support business. Indeed, Ryan et al (2010) set out the views of national NRM Chairs on the need for a new NRM governance that echoes many of my findings, in particular the engagement of government and community on a more equal decision making and collaborative platform, longer term contracts and a more holistic understanding of practical knowledge/wisdom when addressing environmental issues (see also Robins & Kanowski, 2011). Yet, the federal government’s ‘news’ on the environment front in 2014 was the Abbott Government’s decision to plant ‘20 Million Trees’\(^{15}\), echoing the rhetoric of Hawke in 1989 (see Curtis and Race, 1997 for an evaluation of this policy); providing funding to preferred providers (environmental businesses), regional NRM and Landcare to plant the trees and supervise the Green Army\(^{16}\) (job creation); at the same time the government dismantled the carbon tax on big polluters – classic doublespeak.

Brown and Bishop (2011) in examining the concept of paradox in community psychology in the field of NRM have clearly re-stated the conundrum as:

\(^{15}\) See http://www.nrm.gov.au/national/20-million-trees
\(^{16}\) See http://www.environment.gov.au/land/green-army
The ideals of democracy functioning within dominant neoliberal and capitalist world environments, create and form approaches that bring together citizens and scientific/policy experts in a way that still privileges expert frameworks for understanding, but attempts to create settings where communities are transformed by engagement. There is a paradoxical conflict of balancing these different positions of community, layperson or citizen, and the “expert” (359).

They could also add ‘the politicians’ to this list.

I gathered data from both sides of the NRM experiment, mainly focussing on the view from the community group’s experience and this thesis has identified the issues that they reported. I examined some of the meta issues with regard to how government might work to better understand community and vice versa. However, the perennially wicked question remains: that the liminal space that a community group occupies makes relating to them effectively an ongoing challenge for governments and bureaucrats who operate in a more logic based and bounded space. This question could form the basis of a future study.

A RECENT UPDATE...

A recent update in the context of this thesis which also serves to confirm the findings is the publication by Perth NRM (2015) (previously known as the Swan Catchment Council) of the Swan Region Strategy for Natural Resource Management 2015-2020. The authors of the Strategy reviewed what happened over the life of the previous strategy (SCC, 2004) and set out guidelines and indicators for the future.

The Strategy is intended to reflect stakeholder aspirations and priorities for the Region. Responsibility for the management of the Region’s natural resources rests not only with government and natural resource management custodians, but with the entire community. As a consequence, this Strategy seeks to engage all relevant stakeholders in the management of the Region’s natural resources.
These stakeholders include business and industry, research and education institutions, government and the community (Perth NRM, 2015)

It reported that in 2008, the Bilateral Agreement on NRM between the WA State and Federal Governments was discontinued, rendering inter-level liaison at an agency level more complex and the regional NRM groups (non-statutory non-profit organisations in WA) were no longer directly funded or required to have accredited investment plans. The amount of state government funding in Western Australia for NRM was also drastically reduced even though the task is now, if anything, even larger than it was before:

The State Government’s direct contribution to natural resource management funding through the State NRM Office has dropped from $40 million dollars per annum in 2002-2009, to $8 million in 2015. The level of investment in natural resource management is a major limiting factor for the successful protection and management of natural assets (Perth NRM, 2015, 35).

The strategy speaks of the complexity of working in an environment where government departments, agencies and organisations have different aims and employ different processes ranging from the asset based strategy of the NHT2 (identifying Land, Water as separate areas of interest) to a broader risk based approach (Perth NRM, 2015). For instance, the example of the Swan Canning River Park is quoted which has “15 agencies and 21 local governments with a statutory requirement to manage specific aspects of the Riverpark” (33) as well as numerous community based groups active in that area. The strategy also clearly states that there is a need for better coordination of the message and activities from all those with an interest in the environment (government, local government and the community) with a renewed emphasis on the causes rather than short term fixes to the symptoms, if any progress is to occur. English (2009) also recommended that there was a need to simplify the regulatory framework of acts and agency responsibilities to achieve a more streamlined systems based approach by both state and federal governments to NRM and that this must include the community, not just as deliverer but as a valued contributor to plans and strategies.
‘The community’ was recognised in this iteration of the Swan Regional Strategy as a vital key to the future – having been largely invisible in the 2004 version - both in terms of the need to better support existing community based groups and encouraging agencies and local governments to work with them. The strategy recognised that:

Environmental management in the Region is heavily reliant on community stewardship and this contribution is not well recognised or rewarded. This disempowers community groups who end up spending more time disputing and lobbying against government decisions rather than being part of the solution. The contribution of the community sector to natural resource management is also undervalued in terms of the limited investment in the capacity of environmental groups (PerthNRM 2015a).

In order to understand the current feeling of community groups in their region, Perth NRM undertook ‘community capacity assessments’ in 2013/2014 and 2015, funded by the National Landcare Program. They found that “only 20% of respondents received regular sources of income to deliver environmental works” for their groups (Perth NRM 2014); they recognised that the value of community members’ time was immense when calculated at $30 an hour and, importantly, that volunteers’ personal contributions of tools, materials and local knowledge is still underestimated or ignored. This was also noted by English et al (2009) in their Report to the WA Minister of the Environment, one of the several reviews of NRM carried out in the state over the previous decade.

The survey (SCC 2014) also noted that time spent working on ground was likely to be close to equal the hours spent on governance and administration and thus “there was also a positive correlation with possessing organisational capital which is about having systems of governance and policies, processes and procedures that articulate how a group will go about their work.” (9).
Respondents reported group size varied from a preponderance of small friends groups with 2-6 members up to much larger groups like Conservation Volunteers and Friends of Yellagonga Regional Park (Perth NRM, 2015), confirming that the groups which prospered under the NHT regime were more likely to be small friends groups who were not involved in broader NRM politics and concentrated their interest in their local place (Dhakal & Paulin, 2009) or much larger, expert run groups which coordinated volunteer activity as required.

The assessment found that over 80% of respondents were aged over 50 years (2014) and even more respondents were over 60 in 2015, with few new younger recruits. Volunteers were also more likely to be women than men\(^\text{17}\) (Perth NRM 2015b). This is typical of the shape of volunteering in general in Australia and is certainly something that needs to be addressed for the future.

The gaps in community knowledge and skills identified by the community capacity assessments reveal little new information, rather a restatement of the situation and needs that existed back in 2003 (see Figure 7.1 below).

\(^{17}\) It should be noted that the number of respondents to these surveys reduced from 125 in 2014 to 54 in 2015 in a city of 1.9 million people (Perth NRM 2015b). This also reflects the national statistics findings in the ABS General Social Survey (ABS 2014).
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<th>Financial capital – income and assets investment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Storage for tools and equipment</td>
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<td>Office space or headquarters</td>
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<td>Trailer to transport tools and equipment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office equipment – computer, software</td>
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<tr>
<td>An internet site</td>
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<tr>
<td>A First Aid Kit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reference material/books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools and equipment for animal rehabilitation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regular reliable sources of income</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased corporate sponsorship /in kind contributions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased amount of grant funding</td>
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<tr>
<th>Organisational capital investment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Documenting policies and procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial management systems and procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk assessment and risk management procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Records of equipment borrowed or owned by the group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Records of equipment borrowed or loaned by the group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work plans identifying priorities and actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe work procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An orientation process and training for new members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government to provide opportunities for community groups to be involved in strategic planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government to provide opportunities for community groups to be involved in site surveys</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local government and community groups to undertake joint on-ground work together</td>
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</table>

**Figure 7.1:** Summary of capacity ‘gaps’ for NRM identified by respondents (volunteers). *(Perth NRM, 2015b,32)*
Lack of wider community awareness of environmental issues remains high and awareness has further declined from:

“82% in 2007-08 to 62% in 2011–12. In Western Australia, this downward trend coincided with a decrease in concern about water shortages (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012a). While more than half of Australians (53%) thought the natural environment in Australia was declining in 2007–08, less than two in five Australians (39%) felt the same in 2011–12. The survey results suggest a gap in awareness and understanding in the general community with regards to the severity of environmental issues and the urgency of action required (PerthNRM 2015a, 48).

The strategy further noted the community were, still, increasingly ‘disconnected’ from the natural environment, “thereby removing environmental issues from the agenda and from our community’s hearts and minds” (PerthNRM, 2015a, 30). They cite “evidence of an "extinction-of-experience" process in cities, whereby people judge biodiversity and aesthetics according to what they have previously experienced, rather than what may be natural, healthy, and/or desirable in a given environment” (Schwartz et al. 2013, cited in PerthNRM, 2015a, 30).

The 2015 – 2020 Strategy advocates:

- supporting environmental managers and volunteers “through capacity building opportunities, support networks and knowledge sharing”. This would necessitate “increased investment in training and development and the promotion of best practice approaches for environmental management”.

- “greater recognition of the contribution of community groups to natural resource management and increased support through funding and capacity building” including training programs and assistance to recruit younger volunteers.

- “opportunities to increase community involvement through empowered decision making”( SCC 2015a, 30).
The issues identified and recommendations made in the 2015-2020 Strategy (PerthNRM 2015a) are not new and echo the findings of this thesis in the case of urban environments: a misunderstanding or misreading by the ‘bureaucracy’ of the extent of community knowledge and capacity and the importance of community participation and capacity building; confusion, distrust (and sometimes competition) between agencies, NRM councils, local governments and the community groups; disconnects between community awareness and understanding of the issues and what the government thinks the community wants to do; and, since 2004, the relegation of community to being the silent deliverers of government funding to the environmental bureaucracy.

The strategy recognises, too, that not enough progress has been made throughout the NRM experiment because “management is often focussed on the symptom rather than the cause, and the level of investment is not adequate to fully tackle the threat” (Perth NRM, 2015a, 42; see also English, 2009; Auditor General, 2014). One wonders just how much money it would cost to achieve this and whether money is indeed the answer?

In keeping with my published findings (see Appendix B) and research over the period, the 2015-2020 strategy proposes:

- a need to advocate for greater investment in large scale, long-term collaborative projects that can break down traditional silos and support a broader systems thinking approach to natural resource management. By investing in partnerships and capacity as well as projects, there is a clear recognition that effective environmental management requires more than just the delivery of discrete projects (PerthNRM, 2015a, 35)

**SUMMING UP THIS CONTRIBUTION**

This work has been a distillation of the group’s story in order to make their experience visible and thus it draws on the texts and responses that they provided. Yes, there are many government, farming, researchers and community people who
work hard to protect the environment and to find better ways of preserving what we have for the future, even in just tiny corners; they have achieved much in pockets across the country. Overall, however, as English (2009) noted:

Extensive activity has occurred during the last five years and some excellent outcomes achieved by State agency and Regional NRM Group programs. However improvements in program implementation (i.e. planning; service delivery; and monitoring, evaluation and reporting) are needed so that the State’s investment better targets the outcomes sought by the community…

The panel concluded that for the government to successfully implement a State NRM Program that reflects these values and priorities, a strong community engagement component must be an integral part (4).

It is already clear, from the 2015-2020 Strategy and their ongoing public communications, that Perth NRM have made an effort to re-engage with community and the environment groups that were struggling to survive under its previous iterations. These groups are only part of the equation but are key to working away behind the scenes and influencing the wider community by ‘doing’. With a clearer structure and positive recognition by the NRM bureaucracy in Western Australia, they may get the support they need to achieve more: funding, capacity building, expert support and more importantly, recognition and a seat at the table.

For lasting change to occur in natural resource management, the broader community will have to engage and behaviour change is paramount as is re-connecting people to nature. I have previously cited Hamilton (2003) and Pusey (2003) who speak about how modern life is not fulfilling our need for something deeper – a connection to the greater being that is the earth. Over a two year period (2014-2016), I witnessed the transformations (for a day or more) of the people who came to stay – to disappear - at Donnelly River18 - who have no phone or internet connections there and have space just to sit on verandahs and think or read all day and talk to each other and who gradually drive their cars slower and less and then walk more around the village because they don’t have to hurry. The look of wonder on the kids’ faces when the roos and emus let them come close, listening to them calling and laughing as they

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ride bikes and build cubby houses in the trees, the waking up calls across the valley of the kookaburras in the mornings and, later, joined by the chattering and cackling of the cockies in the trees by the dam at sunset on summer evenings. The guests love it and many come back every year or more, but it is just an interval in their busy lives, perhaps the balance should be weighted the other way round?

As Dorothy Smith advised me to do, I have ‘just written it then’. People ask me what I have been writing about and I tell them it is about power and how governments design policy for the community to deliver, how this ‘concerts’ what the group can do and then when the goalposts are suddenly changed what happens to the group – and they say that is really interesting - is it about this group…or that group…or this policy or that one…and then I say no I started writing this a long time ago but it is really still the same and somehow that wheel keeps trundling on – happening in other people’s groups and circumstances now, even as I write.

What of the group? It still just exists. They were looking for officeholders last time I heard…. 
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Report to TRCG Meeting 9 November 2005

Analysis of Wisdom Council held 15 October 2005

Sally Paulin
ISTP, Murdoch University

Invitations were sent via email to all TRCG members and later widened to Bannister Creek CG members. Eight people expressed an interest in attending and ultimately six attended on the day.

The Wisdom Council process uses dynamic facilitation to encourage participants to raise issues within, in this case, the parameters of the question: “What do you believe the future holds for environmental works in the Two Rivers Catchment Area from a community point of view?” The aim of dynamic facilitation is to encourage participants to delineate their own issues and, as these are voiced and discussed, a creative space is opened that allows participants to come up with solutions based on what they have heard and thought about during the session. In this case, I acted as facilitator and provided the parameter of the original question. All attendees were active participants in the discussion which lasted for 1.5 hours.

The discussion ranged from the macro level of larger environmental issues in the Perth metropolitan area down to the micro issues of what the catchment group could actually contribute to educating the community about ecological sustainability.

All comments were recorded on butchers paper and the various issues/thoughts recorded were summarized and fed back to the group at regular intervals.

Major issues arising from the Wisdom Council

- It was felt that at TRCG meetings the balance between community and agency/local government had tipped too far away from the community.
- Community members needed to feel that they could usefully contribute to the discussion and decision making.
- The jargon of NRM may alienate community members from playing a role at meetings and maintaining interest in the group.
- Community volunteers need to; be consulted, valued, respected, supported, thanked, out of pocket expenses re-imbursed, acknowledged by Councils, not see their restoration efforts undermined by continued land clearing, gain something each time; be it satisfaction, knowledge, social interaction, interaction with nature, mixing with like minds, teaching others, fresh air, sunshine, physical exercise.
- Meeting chairs need to keep in mind that all people attending a meeting had to go away with the feeling that they had got something out of it – understanding, progress on a project, appreciation.
- Some members are not aware what role the catchment group played in the larger NRM structure or, in fact, what the larger structure was.
• Possibility of working on a neighbourhood/suburb basis to create environmental awareness amongst the community. The TRCG area is too large to create one vibrant community group.
• If people are to become interested in finding out more about the environment, information/examples/projects have to be easily accessible – in their back yard rather than 10kms away in a place they never knew existed.
• Suggestion that the group should look to the health sector to learn about how they deal with volunteers, engender community interest.
• Useful also to combine somehow the issues of environmental, social and personal health – a more holistic outlook – working with other interest groups
• Build relationships with local schools to encourage teachers to take up opportunities to engender interest in local environment, using TRCG members, Ribbons of Blue, Wastewise schools, Sustainable Education project, etc.
• The suggestion of a LGA funded coordinator to assist the TRCG with creating more vibrant local community activities was well supported.
• While the group suggested that these more local activities would be more effective in creating environmental awareness, they acknowledged the worth of larger projects like Liege Street.
• Concern was expressed that urban sprawl and infrastructure projects were destroying bush at a rate faster than environment groups could reinstate it, eg equivalent of five years work at Garvey Park was destroyed at Beckley Bushland in one day.
• Interest was expressed in hearing about what other groups were doing, both local and further afield, overseas. Garvey Park Friends had formed a sister relationship with Friends of Baigup.

Suggestions for the future

• Build community awareness and interest in the TRCG through holding plant sales, combined with mapping biodiversity corridors and householders native gardens (successfully implemented by Claise Brook CG)
• People need to have a reason to become interested – take opportunities to link local natural history with where people live – people who move into an area, particularly new housing sub-divisions – have little knowledge about what was there before it was bulldozed (again suggestion implemented by Claise Brook CG).
• Work with householders, LGA’s and developers to ensure native plants are used in landscaping.
• Create an information sheet which clearly shows the NRM structure and where the TRCG sits, what activities they undertake and opportunities for involvement in local areas.
• Hold guided walks in local areas pointing out history, biodiversity, endangered species, opportunities etc.
• Encourage community members to become more involved in drawing up strategic plan for the year, designing projects etc.
• A regular informative newsletter is vital. The current newsletter is good but there is scope for community members to take a more active role in putting it together. Make it more community – less agency.
• Rotate TRCG meetings among the five councils – people in Kalamunda may find it off putting to drive to Cannington for a meeting.
- If community involvement can be grown, consider holding a separate meeting with LGA stakeholders (in business hours!) which can then be reported on to the main TRCG meeting. Relations between the community and the LGA’s are vital but it may be useful to find a more effective way of doing this.

- It appears that there is support for the community to play a larger role in the catchment group, though this will initially require a period of capacity building through activities such as providing clear, accessible information, plant sales, bushwalks and building close relationships with existing Friends groups and other groups working in this area, eg Men of the Trees, birdwatchers/native plant enthusiasts. The provision of a coordinator funded by the LGA’s on a long term basis would greatly assist in this and would relieve dependence on other short term funding options.

In summary, in order to create more community involvement, we have to first create awareness and then offer easy opportunities to take part.

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APPENDIX B

Evidence of Published Paper drawn from the Research