

**Facing the Gorgon:
Sustainability assessment and
policy learning
in Western Australia**

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institute.

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Jennifer Margaret Pope
March 2007

Gorgon [gôr'gən]:

In Greek mythology, one of the three monstrous sisters, Stheno, Eurale and Medusa; daughters of Ceto and Phorcus. Their hair was a cluster of writhing snakes, and their faces were so hideous that all who saw them were turned to stone¹.

Middle English, from Latin *Gorg*, *Gorgon-*, from Greek, from *gorgos*, terrible².

¹ The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition, 2001-05. Available online: URL www.bartleby.com

² The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition 2000. Available online: URL www.bartleby.com

Abstract

Sustainability assessment is emerging as a form of impact assessment with the concept of sustainability at its heart. This thesis contributes to the process of theory-building for sustainability assessment through an exploration of the development of this policy tool within the Western Australian context. Through an analysis of the sustainability assessments of the Gorgon gas development on Barrow Island and the South West Yarragadee water supply development, and a process of personal reflection, I explore the potential of sustainability assessment to contribute to a more sustainable society by facilitating learning.

While the focus of traditional forms of impact assessment has typically been ‘exterior’ forms of knowledge and learning relating to the potential impacts of a proposal, or to process methodologies and governance arrangements, in this thesis I argue that sustainability assessment processes should also facilitate ‘interior’ forms of learning that excavate and challenge underpinning assumptions about the organisation of society, including shared discourses and storylines, as well as personal views and beliefs.

To achieve this aim, I maintain that sustainability assessment should be a proactive process that is integrated with the proposal development, framed by an open question and guided by a ‘sustainability decision-making protocol’ that operationalises sustainability for the decision at hand. It should be guided by a structured process framework that assures attention is given to issues that might otherwise be neglected. Each step of the process framework should represent a space for inclusive deliberation, with the concept of sustainability itself acting as a catalyst for learning and reflexivity.

Located within the institutions of modern industrial society, deliberative sustainability assessment processes can contribute to the emergence of an ‘integral sustainability’ that embraces and reconnects the interior and exterior, collective and individual dimensions of policy-making and of society in general. The influence of sustainability assessment can thus extend beyond the immediate decision at hand to contribute to a momentum for societal change towards a more sustainable future.

Publications

Sections of this dissertation have already been presented as conference papers, published as peer-reviewed journal articles or prepared as government reports. They are:

1. Pope, J. (2003a). *Sustainability Assessment Working Group outcomes*. Perth: Sustainability Policy Unit, Department of the Premier and Cabinet (Chapter 2).
2. Pope, J. (2003b, June 2003). *Integrated, strategic assessment of the Gorgon gas development on Barrow Island*. paper presented at the 23rd Annual Meeting of the International Association for Impact Assessment, Marrakech, Morocco (Chapters 1 and 3).
3. Pope, J. (2003c, 17-19 September). *Sustainability assessment: What is it and how do we do it?* Paper presented at the Second Meeting of the Academic Forum of Regional Government for Sustainable Development. Fremantle, Western Australia (Appendix B).

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4. Pope, J., Annandale, D. and Morrison-Saunders, A. (2004). Conceptualising sustainability assessment. *Environmental Impact Assessment Review*, 24(6), 595-616. (This article, the intellectual content of which is mine alone, is reproduced in full in Chapter 2).
5. Pope, J. (2004b). *Background paper: Sustainability assessment in Western Australia*. Perth: Western Australian Department of the Premier and Cabinet.
6. Pope, J. (2004a, April). *Conceptualising sustainability assessment: Three models and a case study*. Paper presented at the 24th Annual Meeting of the International Association for Impact Assessment, Vancouver, Canada.

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10. Pope, J. (2006a, May). *Sustainability assessment: A dialogue of the deaf or a social learning process?* Paper presented at the 26th Annual Meeting of the International Association for Impact Assessment, Stavanger, Norway (Chapters 5 and 6).

11. Pope, J (2006b). Editorial: What's so special about sustainability assessment? *Journal of Environmental Assessment, Policy and Management*, 8(3), v-ix (Chapters 4, 6 and 7).

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Glossary of abbreviations and acronyms

CALM	Department of Conservation and Land Management
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CCWA	Conservation Council of Western Australia
CRG	Community Reference Group
DoE	Department of Environment
DoIR	Department of Industry and Resources
DPC	Department of the Premier and Cabinet
DPI	Department of Planning and Infrastructure
DTF	Department of Treasury and Finance
EIA	Environmental impact assessment
EPA	Environmental Protection Authority
EPBC	Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (Act)
ESE	Environmental, social and economic
IAIA	International Association for Impact Assessment
IWSS	Integrated Water Supply Scheme
JV	Joint venture
GTL	Gas to liquids
LNG	Liquefied natural gas
NCB	Net conservation benefit
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act (United States)
NGO	Non-government organisation
OMP	Office of Major Projects
PPP	Policy, plan or programme
SEA	Strategic environmental assessment
SIAC	Standing Inter-agency Committee of CEOs
SPU	Sustainability Policy Unit
SWY	South West Yarragadee
TBL	Triple bottom line
WRC	Waters and Rivers Commission