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Relative acceptance of traditional and non-traditional rural land uses: Views of residents in two regions, southern Australia

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports research undertaken to examine the relative public acceptance of rural land uses in two regions of southern Australia. Participants from Tasmania and southwest Western Australia completed a questionnaire about their views on the acceptability of ten traditional and nontraditional land uses in rural areas ($n = 2167$). Participants made clear evaluative distinctions between traditional agricultural land uses (cropping, grazing, horticulture, dairy), non-traditional 'green' land uses (wind farms and revegetation), plantations and rural residential development. Analysis of distribution of views suggested strong positive consensus regarding traditional agricultural and nontraditional 'green' land uses, but diverse and sometimes conflicting views regarding plantations and rural residential development. The findings clarify the relative public acceptance of land uses – both controversial and non-controversial – within the study areas, and suggest land use policies that distinguish between traditional agricultural land uses and non-traditional land uses are consistent with public perceptions. The findings also demonstrate that non-traditional land uses may be more acceptable in some regions and among some social groups than others, highlighting the significance of enabling local land use planning priorities.

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1. Introduction

Land use is changing rapidly in many rural areas, often though not always accompanied by controversy. Public views on rural land uses matter. In planning for sustainable rural landscapes, land use planners must consider not only the ecological and economic feasibility of land uses, but also the cultural acceptability of these uses (Firey, 1960; Stankey & Shindler, 2006). Public acceptance of land use change is a critical component of overall social acceptance (Wustenhagen, Wolsink, & Burer, 2007) and has a demonstrated influence on planning and development approval processes (Toke, 2005). In considering public acceptance of new and changing rural land uses, it is critical to recognise that land use change is dynamic and complex (Petit, 2009) and that multiple changes occur at once. Despite this, much past research on public opinion toward rural land uses has focused on comparing new land uses with a single, existing land use (Gilg, 2009), for example new land uses such as wind farms, plantations or rural residential development might be compared with agricultural land uses. Since many new or changing land uses attract little controversy, research has also tended to focus on a limited range of land uses changes. This paper reports a study undertaken to understand the relative public acceptability of multiple land uses – both controversial and less controversial – in rural landscapes.

Public views on land use change have been unevenly documented. Table 1 summarises some of the research undertaken to explore or quantify community views on wind farms, plantations, rural residential development, cropping and grazing. This summary is not comprehensive: since this study focuses on relative public acceptance of land uses, greater attention is given to studies focusing on expressed preference or acceptance, and on studies that seek to quantify preference for comparison. Within this context it demonstrates that controversial new land uses such as wind farms and plantations have received a great deal of research attention. Much less research has been undertaken to understand views on less controversial land uses such as broadacre grazing or cropping. Of course new forms of grazing and cropping have attracted both controversy and research attention, but generally only when associated with significant intensification or change in production methods. Examples include studies of public acceptance of a proposal for a considerable expansion of a dairy farm (Smith, Parsons, Van Dis, & Matiru, 2008) and of intensive pig production sites in Germany (Mann & Kögl, 2003), public resistance to industrial scale goat farm and vineyards (Friedland, 2002), views on organic farm-

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Table 1
Summary of published research regarding public views on traditional and less traditional rural land uses.

Rural land use change	Some relevant studies
Wind farms (On shore)	Devine-Wright (2005, 2009), Dimitropoulos and Kontoleon (2009), Ellis, Barry, and Robinson (2007), Eltham, Harrison, and Allen (2008), ERM/Reark (2007), Graham, Stephenson, and Smith (2009), Jones and Eiser (2009), Lothian (2008), Möller (2006), Simon (1996), van der Horst (2007), van der Horst and Toke (2010), Warren et al. (2005), Warren and McFadyen (2010), Wolsink (2000, 2007, 2010) and Zografos and Martinez-Alier (2009)
Plantations and reafforestation	Barlow and Cocklin (2003), Cao, Xu, Chen, and Wang (2009), Cocklin and Wall (1997), Elands et al. (2004), Elands and Praestholm (2008), Elands and Wiersum (2001), Flechard, Carroll, Cohn, and Ni Dhubhain (2007), Mercer and Underwood (2002), Ní Dhubháin et al. (2009), Nijnik and Mather (2008), Pickworth (2005), Schirmer (2007), Selby and Petajisto (1995), Spencer and Jellinek (1995), Tonts and Greive (2002) and Williams et al. (2003, 2008)
Rural residential development	Curry, Koczberski, and Selwood (2001), Gibson, Dufty, and Drozdzewski (2005), Ryan (2002, 2006) and van Dam, Heins, and Elbersen (2002)
Grazing/animal production	Friedland (2002), Mann and Kögl (2003) and Smith et al. (2008); animal welfare studies María (2006) and Vanhonacker, Verbeke, Van Poucke, Buijs, and Tuyttens (2009)
Cropping/horticulture	Egoz et al. (2001) and Friedland (2002); public views on genetically modified crops for example Aerni (2005) and Morris and Adley (2001)
Cross-land use investigations	Studies dealing with protection of farmland: Duke and Aull-Hyde (2002), Nijnik and Mather (2008), Rogge et al. (2007) and Sharp and Adua (2009) Studies comparing preferred land uses: Swaffield and Fairweather (1996) and Williams et al. (2003, 2008)

ing (Egoz, Bowring, & Perkins, 2001) and use of genetically modified crops (Morris & Adley, 2001). Some traditional agricultural land uses are increasing in many areas – for example expansion of broad-acre cropping in many parts of Australia (Schirmer, Williams, & Dunn, 2009) – yet we have little understanding of how the public views these changes.

Analysis across studies of different land use changes reveals some common explanations for why people accept or oppose any given land use change. Several authors argue that simplistic popular accounts such as 'NIMBYism' (rejection of change occurring in one's 'back yard' or locality) (Devine-Wright, 2005) are insufficient. Devine-Wright (2005) highlights a more complex range of factors influencing views on wind farms. With some adaptation, these factors can be applied to understanding public views on other land use changes. These factors include:

- Physical factors that moderate the visual and other impacts of new land uses, such as visual, acoustic and olfactory characteristics of land use change (for example Lothian, 2008; Mann & Kögl, 2003; Nijnik & Mather, 2008);
- Spatial contextual factors such as proximity to the change, intensity of land use change, and landscape context that moderate the visual and other impacts of new land uses (e.g. Swaffield & Fairweather, 1996; Wolsink, 2007);
- Temporal context such as history of land use and duration of land use change (e.g. short term crops versus long term change) (e.g. Elands, O'Leary, Boerwinkel, & Wiersum, 2004; O'Leary, McCormack, & Peter Clinch, 2000; Williams, Nettle, & Petheram, 2003);
- Political factors such as policy and how this distributes the costs and benefits of land use change, personal and institutional capacity to influence decisions (e.g. Barlow & Cocklin, 2003; Wolsink, 2000)
- Socio-economic factors such as shareholdings in companies involved, provision of employment or flow on benefits from new land uses as well as losses associated with replaced land use (e.g. Warren, Lumsden, O'Dowd, & Birnie, 2005; Williams et al., 2003);
- Social and communicative factors such as media, local networks, trust in organisations undertaking or governing land use change, and social networking that may lead to political action (e.g. Devine-Wright, 2009; van der Horst & Toke, 2010);
- Symbolic factors such as social representations of land uses, evident for example in rejection of land uses that breach ideals of rural landscapes and communities (e.g. Barlow & Cocklin, 2003; Friedland, 2002);
- Local factors such as place and identity processes (for example emotional attachment to a land use may be stronger where the land use forms a significant sense of place and local identity) (e.g. Neumann, Krahn, Krogman, & Thomas, 2007; Wester-Herber, 2004), community costs and benefits of new land uses (e.g. Devine-Wright, 2005; Williams et al., 2003); and
- Personal factors such as past experience and knowledge of land uses (e.g. Ní Dhubháin, Fléchard, Moloney, & O'Connor, 2009; Rogge, Nevens, & Gulinck, 2007).

While research focusing on public views on single land uses has provided many insights, concurrent evaluation of land uses is also important for understanding public acceptance. Brunson (1993, p. 9) defines acceptance as a: 'condition that results from a judgemental process by which individuals (a) compare the perceived reality with its known alternatives, and (b) decide whether the 'real' condition is superior, or sufficiently similar, to the most favourable alternative condition'. When people judge land uses, it is likely judgments are made in comparison to current land uses, or imagined future land uses. In past research, participants have often been asked to judge a single proposed land use, with existing land uses providing an explicit or implicit comparison. Existing land uses may vary within a single study region, and researchers rarely note whether public acceptance varies with existing land use. Furthermore, public judgements may involve implicit comparisons with imagined future land uses, something rarely considered in past research. There is a need for a better understanding of the relative public acceptability of multiple land uses.

Some studies do compare public views on multiple land uses (e.g. Duke & Aull-Hyde, 2002; Rogge et al., 2007; Swaffield & Fairweather, 1996; Wall & Cocklin, 1996; Williams, Dunn, Ford, & Anderson, 2008; Williams et al., 2003). However most of these compare only a narrow range of land uses, or compare less traditional land uses with very general concepts such as 'farming', 'agriculture', 'food production' or 'environmental good'. These present a complex picture of public acceptance of land use change. Wall and Cocklin (1996) found residents were split almost evenly in their preferences for forestry and farming. Swaffield and Fairweather (1996) found preferences for land use varied across land types (e.g. hills, flats) while Rogge et al. (2007) found differences between farmers, landscape experts and country dwellers in regard to functions they considered appropriate in different types of landscapes. Williams et al. (2008) directly compared public views on four land uses. While they found views on two traditional rural land uses (cropping and grazing) were very positive, and views on plantation forestry were diverse and often negative, they also found very strong support for expansion of rural residential development.

Further research is required to understand the relative public acceptability of a wider range of rural land uses. This project there-

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